

# The JET Program Experience through the Eyes of ALTs: A Narrative Inquiry

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## Abstract

This study aims to gain understanding of Assistant Language Teachers' (ALTs) experiences on the Japan Exchange Teaching Program (JET Program) through their stories. More specifically, it aims to understand how ALTs negotiate their layered identities and to explore the reality of the JET Program in contrast to its officially stated purposes. I conducted and transcribed interviews with seven current ALTs and recent JET Program alumni. I then coded the transcripts to both share participant's unique experiences and find emerging themes across stories. Commonalities were found in ALTs encountering inconsistent expectations, experiencing a reality that did not correlate with the official purpose of the JET Program, and depending on fellow ALTs filling in gaps left by JET Program training. This study recommends that the JET Program to create guidelines regarding the roles of ALTs, improve team-teaching training, clarify its purpose, support community involvement, and provide information regarding identity negotiation.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.1 My Story

In an effort to learn a new language and a little bit more about the world around me, I decided to pursue a degree in Japanese during my time as an undergraduate. Japanese was never considered as useful as languages like Spanish or French, so my classmates and I were often questioned about what we would do with our degree once we graduated. For a significant number of my classmates, the answer was the Japan Exchange Teaching Program (JET Program). While my classmates may not have had experience or training in teaching, the JET Program was a common door through which to enter Japanese society, since it didn't require an education degree or TEFL certificate. I found a similar pattern in my Korean classes, with many of my classmates dreaming of joining the EPIK Program to teach English in Korea. Once again, however, actual experience or training in education was scarce.

While I was also interested in teaching English, I felt underqualified to teach a language I had never studied myself. While I could tell whether an English sentence was right or wrong, I couldn't explain why. Even more than that, the thought of lesson planning terrified me since I had no experience. This feeling of lacking the qualifications needed to be a good teacher motivated me to gain as much experience with education as possible without actually being an education major. When my university started a summer internship program teaching English in South Korea, I jumped at the chance to participate. While I had a wonderful experience in South Korea, my internship made me even more aware of how little I knew about teaching English. In addition to being unsure how to best plan lessons and manage the classroom, I also struggled with the co-teaching dynamic. Each teacher brought a different dynamic to the classroom, causing me to have to adjust my teaching style each class to foster an effective cooperative environment. There were also times I was unsure how to interact with my students. The teachers

in the school I was at had different dynamics with their students than my teachers had with my classmates and me when I was in high school. I felt that I should imitate them since they had more experience in the education system I was visiting than I. At the same time, however, both students and teachers appeared to view me differently than they viewed the regular teachers at the school. The sometimes ambiguous nature of my position presented a unique challenge. I particularly felt this ambiguity when it came to socializing with students outside of class. I was encouraged by teachers to spend as much time with students after school as I could and had been told they occasionally had dinner with students. Beyond just dinner, students would invite me to join them in activities they wouldn't normally engage in with their teachers, however, such as going to *noraebang*, Korean karaoke. Because of my lack of knowledge concerning what was acceptable in South Korea and my status as a visiting student teacher close in age to my students, rather than a full-time English teacher, it was challenging to know the expectations and boundaries of my position. While the challenges I faced helped me grow and learn as a future educator, they also made me aware of just how much more I needed to learn before I could be an effective teacher.

Since I was only on a six-week program, I was able to come back to the US and apply to a graduate program in TESOL to learn teaching methodology and prepare myself to go abroad. While I found comfort in my new path in life, it also made me think of all the people I knew who went to Japan to teach with their greatest qualification being their status as a native speaker of English. Surely many of them must have felt just as lost as I had in South Korea, but I was just a six-week intern while they were working full-time jobs as Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs). Did they identify themselves as teachers even though they didn't have the same professional or educational experiences as other teachers at their schools? If not, how did they view themselves?



How did they identify themselves in a way that made them feel like they were fulfilling their duty as participants in the JET Program? What did they feel like their purpose was in Japan? These questions, along with the glimpses into life as a JET that my friends on the program provided me with, motivated me to take up the topic of ALTs navigation of identity for this study.

## 1.2 Introduction to the Research

The JET Program began in 1987 as the result of a government initiative to bring foreigners to Japan to help improve foreign language education and support international exchange (Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR), 2017). While the JET Program started modestly with 848 participants representing four countries, it has grown greatly over the years (Detroit Embassy of Japan, 2011). In 2002, JET Program numbers reached an all-time high with 6,273 participants from 40 countries, and this year it hosted 5,163 participants from 44 different countries (CLAIR, 2017). For more focused recruitment, the JET Program is divided into the JET Program USA for applicants and participants from the United States and the JET Programme for applicants and participants from outside of the US<sup>1</sup>. The JET Program USA receives approximately 4,000-5,000 applications every year, and selects 1,000-1,100 applicants for participation in the JET Program (JET Program 2016). These numbers show that the JET Program has made a name for itself among programs recruiting native speakers to work in education in Japan. While the JET Program includes three different positions participants can hold while in Japan, 90% of participants are hired as ALTs (CLAIR, 2015b). Because of this, participating in the JET Program has become synonymous with working as an

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<sup>1</sup> The distinction between the JET Program USA and the JET Programme can many be seen in the realm of administration of the program are not relevant to the intent of the study, so the JET Program and JET Promgramme with both be referred to as the “JET Program” throughout this study.

ALT in many people's minds. This is furthered by the fact that despite not being the only employer of ALTs, the JET Program hosted 24.5% of ALTs in 2016 and 24.6% of ALTs in 2015, making it the largest single employer of ALTs in Japan (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), 2016). As the number of JET program participants continues to grow, research related to the JET Program and the JET Program's ALTs becomes more important. As the Japanese government continues to pour resources into the program, it is important to evaluate it to determine how it can be improved.

While the JET Program is an impressive initiative for improving the communicative competence of students studying English in Japan, research has also found several areas in which the JET Program could improve. The most common complaint aimed at the JET Program is that it has not been effective in improving communicative teaching due to past and current educational plans outside the JET Program being incompatible with the program's communicative goals (Seargeant, 2009). It can be difficult to integrate the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's (MEXT) plans for the JET Program with the goals and structure of the Japanese educational system at large, as well as the goals and structures of individual schools. This can lead to friction and ambiguity regarding the roles of ALTs in the classroom and in the curriculum. Furthermore, ALTs have also complained of the ineffectiveness of the system, feeling that they are kept as tokens of internationalization and communicative education without being utilized in a useful manner (McConnell, 2000). This complaint may be the direct result of the aforementioned conflicting goals or the result of ALTs and their schools, co-teachers, and students having different ideas of what ALTs are capable of and how they would best be incorporated into classes. In fact, research has shown that ALTs, Japanese teachers of English (JTEs), and students often have different ideas about the purpose and duties of ALTs

(Galloway, 2009; Johannes, 2012; Mahoney, 2004; Miyazato, 2009). In order to be successful, ALTs must negotiate their definition of their identity with those of their co-teachers and students or risk feeling inadequate, ineffective, and frustrated. These feelings may greatly reduce ALTs' ability to be effective in their positions, making it paramount that we learn more about how ALTs navigate their different ascribed identities. In short, despite the best of intentions, the JET Program does not always achieve its aims, placing ALTs in a difficult situation where they must navigate a new country and culture while also having to navigate the complicated relationship of the JET Program and English education in Japan.

### 1.3 The JET Program

#### 1.3.1 Structure of the JET Program

The JET Program is a joint venture among the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), MEXT, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC), and local Boards of Education (BoEs) (JET Program, 2016a). JET participants (JETs) may be employed as ALTs, who teach English in public K-12 schools; Coordinators for International Relations (CIRs), who work for local governments to promote international exchange; or Sports Exchange Advisors (SEAs), who promote international exchange through sports. ALTs make up approximately 90% of the JET population, with CIRs making up the majority of the remaining 10% (CLAIR, 2015b). JETs initially contract with their contracting organization (CO) for one year, but a CO may reappoint their JETs for up to five years. JETs are expected to work approximately 35 hours per week and receive competitive salaries (JET Program, 2016b).

#### 1.3.2 Qualifications of ALTs

While ALTs are not required to be certified in teaching, they must have a bachelor's degree by the beginning of the program (JET Program, 2016c). They also must be interested in Japan and in fostering international exchange with their local community (JET Program, 2016c). In addition to being citizens of the country through which they apply, ALTs who will be teaching English are expected to have standard English pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation (JET Program, 2016c). The specific definitions of standard pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation are not provided in the JET Program's stated qualifications, however, making this an ambiguous requirement. Finally, ALTs must be willing and able to adjust to living and working in Japan and be interested in maintaining a relationship with Japan upon their return home (JET Program, 2016c). These qualifications are clearly stated on the JET Program website, and many potential JET candidates look over these qualifications before applying to the program. Thus, these qualifications shape what qualities and identities ALTs see as essential to being part of the JET Program.

#### 1.4 Research Puzzle

As mentioned previously, ALTs are brought to Japan both to improve foreign language education as teachers and to cultivate international exchange at the level of their communities (CLAIR, 2015a). If we consider these two responsibilities together, we can see that ALTs have an assigned identity both inside the classroom, as teachers, and outside of the classroom, as cultural ambassadors. In addition, ALTs must manage their co-teachers', administration's, students', society's, etc. views of their role as JET Program participants. This study looks at the matrix of identities ALTs must navigate during their time with the JET Program. Furthermore, ALTs' assigned identities and personal experiences affect not only how ALTs identify themselves, but also how they work to fulfill the purpose of the JET Program. Finally, ALTs are

sure to encounter challenges returning home after the JET Program because of how their identity has changed. It is important to consider these challenges as well, even though they occur outside of ALTs' time with the JET Program.

The puzzle I am addressing through this study can be condensed into the following questions:

1. What assigned identities must ALTs navigate during their time with the JET Program?
2. How does the JET Program's purpose play out in reality?
3. What challenges do ALTs face during and after the JET Program?

## 1.5 Significance

This research presents the experiences and stories of seven ALTs who taught in Japan through the JET Program. Through their stories, participants paint a picture of life as an ALT in the classroom and in the community, during and after JET, including both challenges and victories. These stories are significant for those who work with ALTs, either alongside them or hiring them; individuals interested in applying to the JET Program to become ALTs; and the participants themselves.

MEXT has recognized the need to better understand the reality of ALTs lives and roles in the classroom during their time with the JET Program (MEXT, 2011). While every situation is different in the JET Program, by presenting the honest stories of seven ALTs from different prefectures, different grade levels, different schools, different numbers of schools, etc. this study can give examples to the national organizations that run the JET Program of life as an ALT in a variety of situations. This study can be particularly helpful as it doesn't merely describe the situations of ALTs, but includes their reactions to their situations as well. Therefore, in addition

to providing insight into how ALTs are utilized in the classroom and how they fulfill the goals of the JET Program both in the classroom and in the community, this study provides insight into the ALTs themselves. Increased understanding of ALTs' perceptions of their roles, the struggles they face, and their goals with the JET Program can inform training and support to better fulfill ALTs needs.

Beyond governmental organizations, this research can also provide insights for JTEs that work with ALTs. Due to linguistic and cultural barriers, it is only natural that there is sometimes friction between ALTs and JTEs. Many times, this friction is the result of differing expectations and misunderstandings. The stories this study's participants share can give JTEs a new, deeper understanding of ALTs and the types of expectations they bring with them into the JET Program. While expectations and experiences vary greatly from person-to-person, this research provides a variety of perspectives, so in addition to providing examples of these expectations, it also encourages open communication about expectations between ALTs and JTEs by emphasizing the variety of expectations both parties can hold.

This study is also relevant for individuals who are interested in applying to the JET Program. All participants mentioned aspects of their experience that were not what they expected initially. Therefore, the stories presented in this study can inform prospective ALTs about the realities of participating in the JET Program, which will help prepare them both for the opportunities and the challenges they will meet on the program. Furthermore, while there are many blogs run by current ALTs that prospective ALTs can find through a simple search, this study provides a different perspective from such blogs by presenting multiple ALTs' stories side by side. Having stories presented in this style is the most effective way to introduce individuals who are interested in the JET Program to the diversity of ALTs experiences because it is

important for them to understand that reading about one ALT's experience may not give them an accurate perspective on what their experience will be like because every situation is different.

Finally, this study is also significant for the participants themselves. "Re-storying" experiences through narrative inquiry can afford new perspectives and a deeper understanding of experiences (Olson, 2000). Throughout my interviews, a common response to many questions was, "I haven't thought about that before." Participation in this study allowed participants to consider their experiences from a new point of view. Moreover, through the results of the study, participants can gain further perspective by considering their experiences in the context of other participants' experiences.

#### 1.6 Acronyms

AJET: Association for Japan Exchange & Teaching

ALT: Assistant Language Teacher

BoE: Board of Education

CIR: Coordinator for International Relations

CLAIR: Council of Local Authorities for International Relations

CO: Contracting organization

EFL: English as a foreign language

ESID: Every situation is different

JET: JET Program participant (including ALTs, CIRs, and SEAs)

JET Program: Japan Exchange & Teaching Program

JTE: Japanese teacher of English

MEXT: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

MIC: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications

MOFA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NEST: Native English speaker teacher

NNEST: Non-native English speaker teacher

SEA: Sports Exchange Advisor

## 1.7 Summary of Chapter One

Chapter One opened with a brief overview of the researcher's experiences with the JET Program and teaching English abroad. It continued with an introduction of the research, including a description of the JET Program before presenting the research puzzle this study tackles. Next, the significance of the study was discussed. Finally, a glossary of acronyms used throughout the paper was provided.



## Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter presents a review of literature relevant to the study. It begins with an overview of international EFL education, including descriptions of native English speaker teacher discourse, world Englishes, and preconceived images of foreigners and NESTs in Japan. It continues to describe English language education in Japan, including English language education policy and obstacles to policy implementation. It then goes into a description of teacher identity. Finally, it presents an overview of current research on JET Program ALTs, including research on JTEs' perceptions of ALTs, students' perceptions of ALTs, and ALTs' perceptions of themselves.

### 2.1 International EFL Education

As the world continues to globalize, the need to communicate across language barriers has become more and more pressing, prompting the need for an international language. Due to its global spread, English seems to be an obvious choice for a lingua franca (Seargeant, 2009). English's status as an international language has increased necessity for English as a foreign language (EFL) education. While the exact definition of EFL education may be up for debate, it essentially means English language education that takes place in a context that does not provide students with the opportunity to use English regularly outside of the classroom (Y. Kachru & Nelson, 2006). The JET Program and the recruitment of native speakers to work as ALTs in Japan represents efforts by the Japanese government to improve their EFL education. Decisions to create the JET Program and recruit ALTs can be better understood by looking at the theories of native speakerism and world Englishes (Kachru, 1986; Phillipson, 1992).

#### 2.1.1 Native English Speaker Teacher Discourse

Teachers of English are often divided into the categories of Native English speaker teachers (NESTs) and non-native English speaker teachers (NNESTs). This division is particularly salient when considering the JET Program, as ALTs are brought in as NESTs to assist JTEs, who are NNESTs, suggesting the belief that NESTs and NNESTs bring different skills to the classroom. The theory of linguistic imperialism states that native speakers are often seen as ideal language teachers because of their proficiency and ability to act as language models for students (Phillipson, 1992). This belief has led to a strong job market for native speakers seeking to transform their linguistic capital into economic capital through positions teaching English abroad (Pennycook, 2001). The JET Program plays a major role in this market by creating positions for native English speakers in Japan. The structure of the JET Program, however, is not completely in line with the idea that native speakers are the best language teachers, as it encourages team teaching between ALTs and JTEs. This model supports a belief that both NESTs and NNESTs have skills as English teachers. However, it is still important to consider the negative consequences of native speakerism in the Japanese context, as native speakerism is prevalent enough that these consequences may still emerge through the personal beliefs of JTEs, ALTs, or their students. The primary ramification of native speakerism is overlooking the unique skills NNESTs bring to teaching, such as shared identity with their students, acting as learner models, etc. (Kubota, 2009). Ideally, the JET Program capitalizes on these skills through team teaching, but this may not be the case if JTEs, ALTs, or even students, whose views can influence decisions related to instruction, buy into the native speaker fallacy, leading to division of duties based upon these ideas (Mahoney, 2004; Miyazato 2009).

### 2.1.2 World Englishes

It is important not only to consider the negative effects of native speakerism, as World Englishes can also give insight into how ALTs and JTEs are perceived. In addition to 59.4% of ALTs being American during the 2016-2017 school year (CLAIR, 2016), the JET Program also has a separate office for recruiting Americans, the JET Program USA (JET Program, 2016a). This indicates a preference for American English over other English varieties that may be more prevalent in the lives of the Japanese, such as Japanese-English. When considering English around the world, B. B. Kachru (1986) divided English-speaking countries into three circles: the inner circle produced by the first diaspora of English (USA, Canada, Australia, UK, etc.), the outer circle produced by the second diaspora of English (India, Philippines, Singapore, etc.), and the expanding circle where English is prevalent in society but does not hold a historic role (Japan, the Netherlands, Indonesia, etc.). The JET Program's prominent recruitment of American English speakers shows both the belief in the value of native speakers' linguistic capital and the particular value of the inner circle English. This can be problematic as Japan is a member of the expanding circle. Consequently, by promoting inner circle English and the image of inner circle speakers as English-speaking models, the JET Program demotes the English of JTEs and the students themselves to a lower status. This also affects how ALTs are perceived as "owners" of English and affects the identities assigned to them.

### 2.1.3 Foreigners and Native English Speakers in Japan

The categories of "foreigners" and "native English speakers" are broad. They do tend to carry certain expectations in Japanese society, however, that cause Japanese people to make assumptions about foreigners and NESTs in Japan. To begin, traditional conceptions of race in Japan can be organized into a "ladder of civilizations" with Euro-American societies at the top of the ladder, Japan somewhere in the middle, and other Asian countries placed at the bottom of the

ladder (Sugimoto, 2003). In this conceptualization, Whites are seen as progressive and superior to both the Japanese and other Asians. This is important because it shows that Japan views white foreigners in a positive light. It is also vital, however, to notice what is missing from this ladder. Black foreigners and black society are not present on the ladder, suggesting they are an invisible group in Japanese people's minds (Rivers & Ross, 2013). When the Japanese imagine foreigners, the image that most often comes to mind is that of a white American, further supporting this idea (Sekiguchi, 2002). The concepts of foreign countries and foreigners are not the only ideas related to NESTs in Japan that center on the United States, however. Japanese people tend to equate English with the United States as well (Sekiguchi, 2002). These conceptions of foreigners and English affect how ALTs are viewed as NESTs.

The ideal NEST in Japan is a white American (Kubota & McKay, 2009; McVeigh, 2003; Rivers & Ross, 2013). This preference is not always explicitly stated. Being a "native speaker" is a common qualification in job postings recruiting English teachers in tertiary education and is often listed above all other qualifications (Rivers & Ross, 2013). Many institutions are unwilling to elaborate on the specific parameters of the "native speaker" requirement, however, leaving it ambiguous (Rivers & Ross, 2013). While this could be an encouraging sign indicating that the diversity of the "native speaker" category is being recognized, based on Japanese conceptions of race and English, this is unlikely to be the case. When considering the Japanese English language education context, Houghton and Rivers (2013) defined native-speakerism as:

prejudice, stereotyping, and/or discrimination, typically by or against foreign language teachers, on the basis of either being or not being perceived and categorized as a native speaker of a particular language, which can form part of a

larger complex of interconnected prejudices including ethnocentrism, racism and sexism. (p. 14)

Prejudices and stereotypes shape how NESTs, including ALTs, are imagined and viewed in Japan. For example, when asked how university officials identified the nationalities of NESTs, one administrator stated that they were able to tell on sight (Worthington, 2000). This statement about visually being able to identify native speakers suggests the importance of visual cues such as race in defining native speakers as English teachers. When asked, Japanese university students had a distinct preference for white, American, male English teachers, further showing the influence of race on perceptions of teachers (Rivers & Ross, 2013). While the JET Program doesn't keep statistics related to the race of ALTs, a former secretary-general of CLAIR stated that black ALTs' race was considered when placing them during his time because the JET Program administration knew many placements were expecting their ALTs to have white faces and may have reacted negatively if this expectation were not fulfilled (McConnell, 2000). A vice-chair of the Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching (AJET) also noted in an article circled throughout the JET community that, "Apart from Asian-Americans, very few of us fall under headings other than WASP...Color, variety, and pattern have been screened out of the controlled sample brought here for this experiment" (McConnell, 2000, p.80). While the JET Program does not provide statistics supporting or refuting this balance (or rather imbalance) of races, it is clear that there are preconceived notions concerning ideal NESTs in Japan with which ALTs who do not fit this description must grapple.

## 2.2 English Language Education in Japan

Because the JET Program is run by the national Japanese government and ALTs are hired through local BoEs, ALTs are technically government employees. The goal behind governmental

recruitment of ALTs can be seen in Japan's national English education policies, which imply the value and purpose of ALTs in the eyes of the government and how the government defines the role of JET Program ALTs. It is also important to consider the success and the reception of these reforms, as this information hints at how Japanese teachers and the public view the purpose of English education and ALTs. Looking at English education from these different angles gives perspective on the sometimes conflicting ascribed identities ALTs must navigate during their time on the JET Program.

### 2.2.1 English Education Policy

In order to understand the purpose of JET Program ALTs, we must first consider the educational policies that led to the creation of the JET Program. To begin, the Japanese government first emphasized teaching all four language skills through its 1960 *Course of Study*, which included the express goal of students being able to understand speakers of English (Yoshida, 2003). While this *Course of Study* showed that the government valued both receptive and productive English skills, the focus on understanding English speakers and not communicating with them shows support for the development of isolated skills instead of communicative competence. The Tokyo Olympics in 1964 and the Osaka International Exhibition in 1970 pushed Japan into the international spotlight, illuminating the ineffectiveness of teaching the four skills separately (Yoshida, 2003). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the public regularly criticized the government's English education policy because of its lack of focus on English for communicative purposes (Kikuchi & Browne, 2009). Public demand for the development of students' communicative skills shows that the public placed value on not just understanding English, but communicating in English as well. In 1989, the Japanese government made the first major changes to the English curriculum since 1960 by declaring in the new

*Course of Study* that the goal of English education was to develop students' communicative abilities and foster positive feelings toward communicating in English (Yoshida, 2003). This new *Course of Study* shows that the government started to see communicative competence in English as a necessary skill. It was during this time that the Japanese government developed the JET Program.

The JET Program was established in 1987 (CLAIR, 2015a). This places its creation two years before the 1989 *Course of Study* and in the midst of public outcry for increased focus on communication skills in English education. The establishment of the JET Program answered the public's demands and supported the implementation of the 1989 *Course of Study* through its focus on improving foreign language education and promoting international exchange (CLAIR, 2015a). From the public's perspective, having ALTs in schools could increase students' communicative skills by giving them the opportunity to converse with native speakers. At the same time, allowing students to speak with native speakers could help promote positive feelings toward communicating in English by decreasing speaking anxiety through practice and showing students how they could communicate with the world through English. Based on these goals for the JET Program, the roles of ALTs were facilitators of communicative practice and cultural ambassadors who both shared their own culture and learned about Japanese culture.

From 1989 until now, English education in Japan has continued to undergo radical policy changes. Among these reforms, four governmental plans, *Action Plan to Cultivate "Japanese with English Abilities," Five Proposals and Concrete Implementation Plans to Increase Ability in English as an International Lingua Franca, Plan for Implementation of English Education Reform in Response to Globalization, and Plan to Promote Increase English Ability in Students*, referenced ALTs and their role in classrooms directly. The 2003 *Action Plan to Cultivate*

*“Japanese with English Abilities”* extended the maximum employment period for ALTs from three years to five years and promoted skilled ALTs teaching independently (MEXT, 2003). The extended maximum period of employment allowed ALTs who stayed with the program longer to improve their teaching ability through increased experience. Encouraging ALTs to teach independently also showed the government’s belief that ALTs could be effective teachers if they possessed proper skills. At the same time, the government’s emphasis on “skilled ALTs” also revealed that the government didn’t believe all ALTs could solo teach, making the role and duties of ALTs ambiguous. The *Action Plan to Cultivate “Japanese with English Abilities”* also mentioned using ALTs to enrich students’ opportunities to use English through English cafes and speech contests (MEXT, 2003). Specifically calling on ALTs and not JTEs to work with English cafes and speech contests reflected the belief that NESTs are particularly suited for oral communication activities. Interestingly, promoting English cafes and speech contests were the only concrete duties, other than independent teaching on the part of some ALTs, assigned to ALTs in this plan, leaving the specifics of ALT responsibilities unclear.

In its 2011 *Five Proposals and Concrete Implementation Plans to Increase Ability in English as an International Lingua Franca*, MEXT explicitly stated the purpose of ALTs was to expose students to practical English and help augment students’ opportunities to use English in authentic situations (MEXT, 2011). This showed unequivocally that the government centered ALTs’ role in Japan’s education system on developing students’ communicative abilities. The *Five Proposals and Concrete Implementation Plans to Increase Ability in English as an International Lingua Franca* was radical because it recognized in its implementation plans the need for the national government to understand the reality of how ALTs are used and the need to provide BoEs and schools with information on team teaching and how to use ALTs effectively



(MEXT, 2011). These implementations resulted from gaps between what the national government believed ALTs should be doing and how local entities utilized their ALTs. Such gaps may have been the result of the national government, BoEs, and schools seeing the roles of ALTs and how best to utilize them differently. These differences led to different views of ALTs that ALTs had to navigate.

In 2013, the Japanese government issued the *Plan for Implementation of English Education Reform in Response to Globalization*. As in the *Action Plan to Cultivate “Japanese with English Abilities,”* this plan once again indicated the need for skilled ALTs to be allowed to teach classes independently (MEXT, 2013). The repetition of this goal shows the continued gap between government plans for ALTs and implementation of these plans, potentially indicating conflicting views about the role of ALTs. Perhaps as a reaction to this gap, this plan also recognized the need to create guidelines for the use of ALTs to encourage their utilization and ensure the quality of the education they provided (MEXT, 2013). The need for guidelines recognized inconsistency in how ALTs were used and what was expected of them. Particularly for ALTs who worked at multiple schools, this meant that ALTs had to navigate those different expectations throughout their experience.

Expectations for ALTs made a final and brief appearance in the 2015 *Plan to Promote Increase English Ability in Students*. In order to increase and improve activities related to speaking, the government once again stated the need to utilize ALTs proactively (MEXT, 2015). This plan, however, did not provide more concrete examples of how ALTs should be utilized proactively, leaving their specific roles ambiguous. In summary, how the Japanese government defines the roles of ALTs can be seen through English education plans it issues. We can also see suggestions of the government, BoEs, and schools viewing the roles of ALTs differently, placing

ALTs in a situation where their employer, the Japanese government, and their direct supervisors and coworkers, their BoE and schools, have different expectations for them.

### 2.2.2 Obstacles to Implementation

As seen in the previous section, education policies concerning ALTs are not always implemented. It is important to look at what obstacles have prevented implementation as they may also play a role in defining the roles of ALTs. Some obstacles also represent aspects of English education that teachers give priority to over communicative education with ALTs. These obstacles in particular play a role in defining the roles of ALTs in schools by determining how much instruction time they are allotted, how importantly their lessons are viewed, etc. For now we will focus on the greatest obstacle to implementation, as it is relevant across schools and prefectures.

The most commonly reason teachers cited for not implementing English education reforms with communicative focuses was pressure to prepare students for entrance examinations (Kikuchi & Browne, 2009; Matsuda, 2011; Stewart, 2009; Yoshida, 2003).

University entrance examinations in Japan traditionally focus on grammar and receptive skills (Miyazato, 2009). Hence, teachers feel pressure to focus on developing students' grammar and reading skills at the expense of communicative lessons, so students will be successful on these entrance exams. It may be argued that teachers should allow time for students to improve their communicative skills, as these skills will serve them long after they finish their schooling. Many teachers, however, only recognize students' need for English in order to gain admission to prestigious high schools and universities and don't believe students' will need to communicate in English once they graduate (Matsuda, 2011). With this mindset, it is only natural that the utilization of ALTs in reality is less than the government would like, as ALTs are not seen as

directly contributing to students' entrance examination scores. ALTs must negotiate their roles as resources to increase students' communicative competencies in curricula that prioritize grammar knowledge and reading skills.

The negative backwash created by high school entrance exams may be mitigated in the near future, however, as some prefectures are revising their entrance examinations and entrance examination policies. On December 14, 2017, an investigative committee of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Board of Education proposed adding a speaking section to the entrance exams for prefectural high schools starting in 2019 (Minami, 2017). If this reform takes place, teachers will need to spend more time focusing on students' communicative skills whether they believe English communication skills will be useful to students beyond their entrance exams or not. In turn, this will have strong implications for ALTs' roles in schools, as their instruction will directly prepare students for entrance exams instead of simply being extra information for students. Public high schools in Osaka have also started to consider scores on outside English examinations, such as the STEP Eiken, which includes an interview portion, when considering students for admission ("都立高入試," 2017). While this will most likely influence extracurricular instruction more than ALTs as the English language curriculum does not require students to take outside English examinations, it reveals that Osaka is placing more value on communicative English skills, which may also affect how ALTs' roles and duties are seen. Furthermore, Osaka hopes to replace this system soon with its own speaking sections on its high school entrance examination ("都立高入試," 2017). If this occurs, ALTs will start to play a more central role in preparing students for these examinations. While these reforms may affect ALTs in these areas, it is difficult to predict exactly what the outcomes will be and if they will

influence the experiences of ALTs in other prefectures as well or not, potentially making the overall role of ALTs even more ambiguous.

### 2.3 Teacher Identity

Traditionally, identity has been seen as fixed, stable, and bound to social classifications (Ricento, 2005; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005; Widdicombe, 1998). Recent research on social identity, however, has come to a different conclusion. Identities are multiple, changing, and conflicting (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Norton, 2000; Norton and Toohey, 2011; Varghese et al., 2005). For example, as language teachers and cultural ambassadors, ALTs take on a variety of social and cultural roles as well as identities simultaneously. Their identities range from NESTs to expatriates to cultural individuals to members of families, the JET community, and society at large (Duff & Uchida, 1997). ALTs inhabit these various identities simultaneously, even if some may be conflicted. To add another layer of identity, it is important to consider assigned and claimed identities. Assigned identity is imposed by others onto an individual, while claimed identity is the identity or identities individuals acknowledge for themselves (Varghese et al., 2005). ALTs encounter a variety of assigned identities from their co-teachers, students, administrations, and community (Galloway, 2009; Johannes, 2012; Mahoney, 2004; McConnell, 2000; Miyazato, 2009; Rivers & Ross, 2013). These assigned identities do not necessarily correlate exactly to ALTs' claimed identities, as they don't have to claim every identity they are assigned. Rather, identity is a process that is influenced by a variety of factors (Duff & Uchida, 1997).

Among individuals' various identities, which identities come to the forefront and which identities stay in the background depends on, "institutional and interpersonal contexts, purposes, and personal biographies" (Duff & Uchida, 1997, p.452). For example, different identities may

come to the forefront when teachers are teaching in their classrooms rather than when they're attending a meeting or buying groceries because the contexts and purposes are different. Therefore, identity is an ongoing process rather than a static result (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Ricento, 2005; Rodriguez & Cho, 2011). In their teacher identity processes, ALTs are influenced by their institutional settings and expectations (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Feryok, 2012). This includes the different classrooms and schools in which ALTs teach, as each can present a different setting and set of expectations. As a result, as ALTs encounter a variety of institutional settings and expectations, which are also likely to include a variety of assigned identities, they must negotiate their identities, determining which identities to bring to the forefront, depending on the various worlds they inhabit (Ricento, 2005). Furthermore, identities are also influenced by social, cultural, and political context (Varghese et al., 2005). Therefore, ALTs who are expatriates coming from one set of social, cultural, and political contexts to a new set of social, cultural, and political contexts, are expected to experience identity negotiation outside of the classroom as well.

## 2.4 Current Research on JET Program ALTs

While the majority of current research on JET Program ALTs focuses specifically on the team-teaching dynamic between JTEs and ALTs, it provides valuable insight into how ALTs, JTEs, and, on occasion, students view the role of ALTs in the classroom. There are some consistent points across the three groups and the studies, but there are also many instances during which views of the roles of ALTs diverge. It is in these situations that ALTs must negotiate their identity as differing views are ascribed to them.

### 2.4.1 JTE Perceptions of ALTs

There are a range of team teaching dynamics between JTEs and ALTs. Some JTEs step aside and allow ALTs to take the starring role in classes while JTEs act primarily as interpreters. Other JTEs maintain the normal dynamic of their classrooms and simply utilize ALTs as “human tape recorders” to present students with native English pronunciation (McConnell, 2000). This range indicates that JTEs’ views of ALTs are diverse and influence how much agency ALTs are given in the classroom. There are some common ideas JTEs hold concerning ALTs and their roles, however. Research has shown that JTEs recognize that ALTs bring the benefit of native pronunciation to the classroom (Miyazato, 2009). Some JTEs have also seen the primary role of ALTs as representatives of their cultures (Mahoney, 2004). In both of these roles, ALTs’ ability to benefit the classroom is directly related to their status as NESTs, placing their role in contrast with NNEST JTEs. Not all JTEs have been satisfied with the native English of ALTs, however, complaining that ALTs often make spelling and grammar mistakes (Miyazato, 2009). This complaint further supports the idea of JTEs finding the primary value of ALTs in their native speaker status. When ALTs fail to be perfect models of English, which is a common expectation of native speakers, it is seen as ALTs failing to fulfill their purpose. JTEs do not always separate the roles of ALTs and themselves, however, as some JTEs recognized that both parties can teach about culture, provide grammar instruction, and prepare students for their entrance examinations (Johannes, 2012). While this overlap in perceived ability is encouraging, as it goes against a strict NEST/NNEST dichotomy, it is unclear how widely this perception is held. Therefore, it is possible that even within a single school ALTs may encounter JTEs who have differing ideas as to the role of ALTs, causing them to have to negotiate their roles from class to class.

#### 2.4.2 Student Perceptions of ALTs

Students tend to see ALTs as the main teachers, rather than assistants, in communicative English classes due to their status as native speakers (Miyazato, 2009). In fact, some students have professed a belief that ALTs and JTEs serve very separate functions, stating ALTs should teach communication, pronunciation, and culture while JTEs can focus on grammar, exam preparations, and English study skills (Johannes, 2012). The realms of instruction students have assigned to ALTs are once again more based on the inherent knowledge and skills of a native speaker rather than on skills related to foreign language instruction. Meanwhile, topics that require more specific knowledge or instruction are assigned to JTEs. In comparison to teachers who recognized overlapping abilities for JTEs and ALTs, students appear to subscribe to a stricter NEST/NNEST binary. The differences between JTE perceptions of ALTs and student perceptions of ALTs present another set of ascribed roles ALTs must navigate. It is also important to note that research found that students most readily viewed white Americans as speakers of English (Galloway, 2009; Matsuda, 2003). While this view may go unnoticed to ALTs who fit this image, it presents potential challenges for ALTs who do not fit students' mold of English-speaking foreigner, as they must navigate the conflict between students' perceptions of the world and the reality they represent.

#### 2.4.3 ALT Perceptions of themselves

The majority of ALTs see their role in the classroom as models of English pronunciation and conversation (Mahoney, 2004). While this generally matches the perceptions of JTEs and students, conflict appears when we delve into the specifics of their visions of themselves in the classroom. ALTs bring the values of their home's educational system when they come to Japan, causing many ALTs to view themselves as facilitators of students who are actively participating in their lessons (McConnell, 2000). Unfortunately, this image does not fit easily into the

Japanese educational model where classes are teacher-focused and students passively receive information (McConnell, 2000; Miyazato, 2009). In these cases, ALTs must adjust their image of an effective teacher, somehow manage to adapt the Japanese class to their preferred educational model, or accept a negative evaluation of themselves. This, of course, is a struggle primarily experienced in classrooms where ALTs experience a fair amount of agency. In classes where ALTs are primarily utilized as pronunciation models, many ALTs create roles for themselves because they feel they are not as involved in the class as they should be (Johannes, 2012). As a result, it can be challenging for ALTs to negotiate their identity whether they are highly involved in a class or experience classes from a peripheral position. As the specifics of ALTs teaching situations can vary from school to school and class to class, they must navigate a variety of ascribed identities weekly if not daily during their time with the JET Program.

## 2.5 Summary of Chapter Two

This chapter reviewed the literature related to international EFL education, English education in Japan, teacher identity, and JET Program ALTs. Chapter Three will introduce the research methods of this study.



## Chapter Three: Methods

This chapter opens with a brief overview of the study and a detailed description of narrative inquiry. It then shares more of the researcher's story and positionality before discussing the limitations of narrative inquiry. Next, a detailed description of the research study, including introductions to the participants and methods used for the first and second interviews, is presented. Finally, the analytical process is described. All names of participants have been changed to pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

### 3.1 A Brief Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the stories of JET Program ALTs. Through convenience and snowball sampling, seven participants were recruited. Participants were informed that participation would involve two to three one-on-one conversational interviews that were expected to last approximately one hour. All participants quickly agreed to participate and seemed interested in sharing their stories. Two rounds of one-on-one interviews were conducted. A third round of interviews was deemed unnecessary due the volume and quality of data collected in the first and second interviews. Notes were taken during and after interviews and interviews were transcribed to create field texts. Preliminary analysis of field texts was conducted after the first round of interviews. A more complete analysis of all field texts was carried out after the second round of interviews. The results of the analysis are discussed in Chapter Four.

### 3.2 Narrative Inquiry

In this study, I'm looking at the lived experiences of ALTs in all their complexity. Narrative inquiry recognizes that humans live life through stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Furthermore, it asserts that stories are how individuals interpret their experiences to create

personal meaning (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Therefore, to understand the experiences of ALTs and the personal meanings they draw from these experiences, it is important to listen to the stories of ALTs in their own words. Because stories allow us to see not only what has occurred objectively, but also how these occurrences are represented in the minds of research participants, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) asserted that stories are the most effective way to represent and gain deep understanding of experiences. As this study is looking into the individual experiences of ALTs and their negotiation of the multiple identities ascribed to them, it is vital to understand ALTs' experience through their own lens of interpretation. Narrative inquiry facilitates this through its view of story and experience.

While “narrative” and “story” may be synonyms in certain contexts, in narrative inquiry, “narrative” refers to the method used to understand experiences while “story” is the phenomenon being observed (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). As mentioned previously, stories are how people interpret their experiences and make them personally meaningful (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Because stories in narrative inquiry are included in the meaning-making process, narrative researchers recognize that stories are the result of individuals' personal histories and social influences on both individuals and their environments (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). While the application requirements and very nature of the JET Program may lead ALTs to share certain traits, each ALT brings a unique set of past experiences that influences the personal meaning they find in the everyday occurrences of life on the JET Program. ALTs are also placed in greatly varying situations, with differences ranging from the size of the city in which they are placed to the ideas about foreigners held by those around them and their schools' expectations for them. These differences are not variables to be controlled, but are rather valuable pieces of information that allows us to peer more deeply into ALTs' experiences. In education, nuanced

understanding of participants' stories has been particularly pertinent in understanding how teachers' stories inform their practice (Bell, 2002). As such, understanding ALTs' stories can help us gain insight into how they choose to live out their position as English teachers and cultural ambassadors in Japan.

Narrative relies on readings of rich data sources in the form of texts (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). While this study was conducted primarily through interviews, all interviews were transcribed to create texts that could be analyzed. My field notes from the interviews and journal entries concerning my research journey were also used as data sources. Narrative inquiry is a collaborative process between the researcher and participants, so it is important to also collect data related to researchers' experiences throughout studies (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). It is important to not just analyze participants' stories, but also researchers' reactions to their stories to better understand the connections researchers make and the meaning researchers find in participants' stories. Clandinin, Connelly, and Chan (2002) further encouraged narrative researchers to look at data from different angles by reading all field texts in three ways: to recover meaning, reconstruct meaning, and read at the boundaries of stories. These three readings allow the researcher to gain a more holistic and complex understanding of texts, leading to more meaningful representations of stories.

Once field texts have been analyzed, narrative researchers must reconstruct these texts as research texts, which consist of our interpretations of field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Because we are interpreting the stories of others, it is important to recognize that as researchers we are assigning meaning to the lived experiences of our participants (Bell, 2002). Our assignment of meaning further emphasizes the importance of considering the role we play in narrative inquiry and our reactions to participants' stories, as these experiences and perspectives

influence our interpretations. In order to avoid an overly simplistic or even misleading retelling of stories, it is important to share our work with others whose responses may give us new perspectives as to how our participants' stories may be retold (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As we retell our participants' stories, it is crucial that we consider our positionality as researchers.

### 3.2.1 Researcher Positionality

Narrative inquiry is a collaborative process between researcher and participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly 2000). As a result, researchers' multiple identities and experiences play a large role in the research process, in particular, by informing researchers' gazes and interpretation of data (Cuthill, 2015; Norton & Early 2011). Participants' experiences are represented through the voices of researchers, so it is vital to acknowledge the position of the researcher in qualitative studies (Canagarajah, 1996). In order to understand my positionality in this study, I reflected upon my experiences with NESTs teaching in EFL contexts and, more specifically, with the JET Program.

While I don't remember the exact details of when I first learned about the JET Program, I know it happened early on in my bachelor's degree program. Because I was studying Japanese, JET Program recruiters often sent us information or visited our Japanese classes. Many of my classmates were also planning on joining the JET Program upon graduation, as it would give them the chance to live and work in Japan. As I continued studying, many of my friends joined the JET Program as ALTs and shared their experiences with me. I was intrigued by how different their experiences were. Some taught classes essentially by themselves. Others existed more on the periphery of the classroom, participating only occasionally. Some travelled all over Japan and experienced as much as possible because they felt it was their responsibility to capitalize on the culture exchange aspect of the JET Program. Others felt their primary purpose was in the

realm of English education. Some wanted to be teachers in the future. Others just wanted to be in Japan and improve their Japanese. Each story was so unique that I couldn't create a clear picture in my mind of what being an ALT for the JET Program entailed. Hearing these diverse stories, I wanted to learn more about the JET Program and life as an ALT to see if I could find the common threads among ALT experiences or if experiences were so diverse that there were no common threads to be found. While at the time I wasn't considering conducting a study on ALTs' stories, looking back I do see this curiosity as the starting point of my inspiration for this study and also want to recognize that my participants' stories are not the only stories of the JET Program that I've heard. While the many stories I've heard over the years may not find their way directly into my study, they surely affect how I interpret participants' stories.

Moreover, listening to my friends' stories also made me interested in teaching English abroad. Because I'd also heard stories of friends who loved teaching in theory, but quickly discovered they didn't love it as much in practice, however, I wanted to gain as much teaching experience as I could before I officially decided what I wanted to do upon graduation. In addition to teaching English in my university's English conversation groups, this desire led me to apply through my university for an internship teaching English in South Korea for six weeks (Cho & Peter, 2017). While this experience was different in many ways from the experiences of my friends on the JET Program, I also discovered similarities between what I felt and what my friends had shared with me. Being thrown into teaching without formal training was overwhelming at first. Team-teaching was challenging because each co-teacher had a unique teaching style to which I needed to adjust. I also felt that expectations for me were different depending on the teacher with whom I was working. Some expected me to teach and manage the classroom while they either participated in the activities I prepared or worked on other things,

while others saw classroom management as their responsibility or would translate regularly for the students. It wasn't just the expectations of my co-teachers I had to navigate, however. There were times when the school's expectations for me and my co-teachers' expectations for me were in direct conflict. These situations presented another set of expectations for me to navigate. As I reflected on my experiences and my friends' experiences, I wondered if they also had to negotiate their roles in the classroom as different identities and expectations were ascribed to them. These wonderings are the basis of this research. They shaped my research questions and inspired the initial interview questions I developed. My experiences also shaped what stories I expected to hear from participants and what information caught my attention during the data analysis process. Thus, I took field notes and analyzed interviews in multiple ways, as will be discussed in detail in 3.4, to reflect upon my positionality throughout the research process.

While my experience teaching abroad is not included in the research, as it was not with the JET Program and was under vastly different circumstances, my experiences shape how I view the experiences of my participants and the questions I ask them. It is important to recognize my experiences through my story in Chapter One and this positionality statement. Overall, I believe my experiences helped me relate to my participants and gain further insight into their feelings and motivations. I also recognize, however, how they could introduce bias to the study, so I shared my findings with friends and my graduate student writing group to ensure others could come to the same conclusions based on the data.

### 3.2.2 Limitations of Narrative Inquiry

One of the greatest questions in narrative inquiry is whether the stories participants share are fact or fiction (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Unfortunately, the distinction between fact and fiction is not clear-cut (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Rather, what is true in one situation or for

one person may not be true in another situation or for another person (Bruner 1986). Therefore, the primary truth narrative researchers should seek is narrative truth, creating a plausible account without twisting or misrepresenting stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). At the same time, it is possible for participants to feel pressure to prevaricate, retelling their stories in the way that makes them sound best (Grumet, 1987). Thus, it is important to build rapport with participants, so they feel comfortable sharing their stories openly and honestly. During my interviews, I tried to avoid leading questions and to actively listen to what participants had to say, accepting responses openly and without judgement. I hoped this would prevent participants from feeling pressure to share certain stories because they seemed to be what I wanted to hear. Also, whenever participants expressed concerns that their answers were not good enough or might not be providing me with the data I was looking for, I always told them that I recognized that every ALTs' experience was different, so I wasn't looking for specific answers or judging one ALT's story against another's story. Rather, as long as answers were honest, they were exactly what I needed. I hoped this would help my participants feel comfortable sharing even the parts of their story they saw as less perfect.

When looking at identity specifically, there is also a particular danger of omissions in stories, as participants tend to present stories that support the identities they claim, leaving out details or events that may undermine these identities (Bell, 2002). In order to combat this as best we can, it is important for researchers to acknowledge and be aware that narrative secrets and untold stories may exist (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I made an effort to ask participants questions that looked at their identity from different angles. In this way, I was able to understand the greater picture of their claimed identities and potentially see where untold stories may exist. It was also useful to have two interviews with each participant, so I could ask clarifying

questions in second interviews if I thought I found hints of a potential untold story in the transcript of the first interviews.

Despite these concerns related to narrative inquiry, it was still seen as the most appropriate research method for this study. Additionally, the subject matter of the interviews was not seen as sensitive, making it less likely for participants to feel the need to alter their stories for the sake of appearances. All the participants seemed eager to share their experiences in Japan and with the JET Program. As mentioned previously, I also worked to maintain positive relationships with all my participants to further encourage open sharing of stories. Overall, I have no reason to believe my participants' stories were intentionally misleading in any way.

### 3.3 The Study in Greater Detail

At the beginning of this study, I knew between ten to twenty JET Program ALTs from my time studying Japanese in the US and in Japan. I initially reached out to a few who I thought might be interested in participating in my study through a letter that had been approved by my university's IRB (Appendix A). Because the initial individuals I reached out to were acquaintances of mine, I knew they might feel pressure to participate because of our relationship. In order to relieve this pressure, I reminded them that their participation was completely voluntary, and I would understand if they chose not to participate. I also provided everyone I reached out to with a secondary letter (Appendix B) they could share with anyone else they knew that they thought might be interested in participating. I made sure to reiterate with any potential participants who contacted me through the contact information I provided in the letter that their participation in the study was completely voluntary.

#### 3.3.1 Participants



I recruited seven participants for this study. Specific demographics were neither sought nor excluded in the recruitment process, with the exception of nationality, since this study focuses on NESTs from inner circle English countries. Participation was also limited to current ALTs and recent alumni of the JET Program, defined as having completed the program in the last two years. Five participants are current ALTs, while two are alumni of the JET Program. Six participants are from the United States, while one participant was from the United Kingdom. Three participants are female, and four participants are male. Five participants are white, and two are black. Four participants joined the JET Program directly after graduating from their undergraduate programs, one after graduating from a master's program, and two after working for a time after graduating from university. In order to protect participants' anonymity, pseudonyms are used throughout this paper.

Mark is an American who is in his first year with the JET Program. Unlike the majority of JET Program ALTs and the rest of participants, Mark went to Japan as an early departure ALT, meaning that he started in April, the beginning of the Japanese school year, instead of in August, when most ALTs begin. Mark worked in social work before joining the JET Program and decided to apply because he wanted to change jobs and had recently visited a friend in Japan who was an ALT. He had always been interested in Japanese culture and hoped to learn more about Japanese language and culture during his time with the program. Mark was placed in a city of approximately 110,000 people at a combined middle and high school. While he didn't have formal training in education before becoming an ALT, he did have experience creating lesson plans at his previous job. He plans on staying with the JET Program for a while longer. A friend introduced me to Mark after hearing that I was planning on conducting research regarding ALTs in the JET Program.

Samantha is an American who is in the middle of her second year as an ALT. When she first heard about the JET Program, she was interested in joining because she wanted to improve her Japanese with the eventual goal of becoming a literary translator. When she actually applied to the program, her goals had shifted, and she was more interested in seeing if she found language education interesting. Samantha was placed in a city with a population of just under 40,000 people and teaches at elementary and middle schools. While she stayed at the same middle school throughout both years she taught, she also started teaching at a new middle school during her second year as an ALT. Samantha's teaching experience before joining the JET Program included leading conversation groups for international students at her university and working at a preschool for one year as a literacy tutor through Americorps. Samantha is planning on returning to the US at the end of this contract year. She is planning on looking for a job and hasn't ruled out working in the education sector. Samantha and I first met in college and studied abroad in Japan together.

Rachel is an American and is in the middle of her second year with the JET Program. Originally, she hadn't been interested in joining the JET Program because of all the horror stories she'd heard about it. After having negative experiences while studying abroad for a year, however, she decided she wanted to go back to see a different side of Japan by teaching and working there. Rachel joined the JET Program immediately after graduating and was placed in a city of about 60,000 people, teaching at elementary and middle schools. She did not stay at the same schools between her first and second year with the JET Program and is currently teaching at four different schools. Due to her interest in teaching, Rachel completed an Oxford TEFL certificate before joining the JET Program. While she decided not to recontract with JET for another year, Rachel is interested in continuing teaching, hopefully at the university level,

starting next year, with the eventual goal of working in a university study abroad office. I was also introduced to Rachel through an ALT friend who had met her at the JET Program Tokyo orientation.

Jacob is an American who is in the middle of his first year with the JET Program, having worked as an ALT for six months at the time of our first interview. While he'd been highly interested in applying to the JET Program when he initially heard about it during his time as an undergraduate, his interest waned for a time after achieving his goal of going to Japan through study abroad and an independent homestay program. After a stint working unsatisfying jobs upon graduation, Jacob wanted a change and heard from a friend that he was applying to the JET Program. This prompted Jacob to do the same. He was also interested in seeing more of Japan and improving his Japanese. Upon acceptance, Jacob was placed in a city of about 200,000 and is currently teaching at one middle school and three elementary schools. Before joining the JET Program, Jacob had experience tutoring during college and teaching as a substitute teacher after college. While he didn't take these jobs with the JET Program in mind, the skills he developed there have served him well as an ALT. Jacob plans on continuing with the JET Program for the foreseeable future. I was introduced to Jacob through a friend who had mentioned my study to him.

Chris is my one participant who was from the UK. He is in his second year with the JET Program and had been in Japan for one year and seven months at the time of our first interview. Despite having no experience with Japan or Japanese, Chris applied to be an ALT directly after completing his master's degree. His motivation for applying to the JET Program was a desire to learn about a new culture and human relations, learn a new language, and gain a new perspective on the world, as he saw this as beneficial to his future career as a diplomat. Chris was placed in a

city with a population of approximately 80,000 and is teaching at three high schools. He didn't have any teaching experience before joining the program, but shows great motivation to teach. Chris is planning on staying with the JET Program for a while longer. I was also introduced to Chris through a friend after he expressed interest in my study.

Jon is American and is one of two participants who were alumni of the JET Program. Jon joined the JET Program directly after graduating with his bachelor's degree in Japanese and worked as an ALT for two years. While Jon had spent one year studying abroad in Japan during his time as an undergraduate, he wanted to return to Japan and try working there. He saw the JET Program as an opportunity to gain work experience in Japan without needing further professional credentials. Jon was also interested in living in a different country, meeting new people, working as a cultural ambassador, and improving his Japanese. During his time as an ALT, Jon taught in a small city with a population of approximately 40,000 people, teaching at two schools. The first school was a combined elementary and middle school, while the second school was a traditional middle school. While he didn't have formal training in education before teaching in Japan, Jon did have experience teaching Japanese at an intensive language summer camp in the US. After completing his time with the JET Program, Jon returned to the US to attend graduate school. I met Jon in college in one of my Japanese classes.

Amanda is American and is also an alumnus of the JET Program, having worked as an ALT for six years, five years with the JET Program and one year as a private hire, directly after graduating with her undergraduate degree. Amanda had also studied abroad in Japan for one year, but wanted to return to Japan through the JET Program as it was a way to marry her passions for Japan and teaching. Amanda was placed in a town of 15,000 and taught at various elementary schools and middle schools. The exact schools she was teaching at and even the

number of schools in the area changed from year to year. While Amanda didn't have teaching experience before joining the JET Program, she did complete a TEFL certificate program during her third year as an ALT. After completing her sixth year as an ALT, Amanda came back to the US and started pursuing a graduate degree in education. I was introduced to Amanda through a friend.

Table 1: *Demographic Information of Participants*

Name (pseudonym)	Home country	Race	Time with JET Program (at time of first interview)	Grade level	Population of placement
Mark	USA	White	9 months	Middle and High school	110,000
Samantha	USA	White	1 year, 5 months	Elementary and middle school	40,000
Rachel	USA	White	1 year, 5 months	Elementary and middle school	60,000
Jacob	USA	White	5 months	Elementary and middle school	200,000
Chris	UK	Black	1 year, 5 months	High school	80,000
Jon	USA	Black	2 years (alumni)	Elementary and middle school	40,000
Amanda	USA	White	6 years (alumni)	Elementary and middle school	15,000

### 3.3.2 First Interview

First round interviews were scheduled as soon as participants officially agreed to participate. As only one participant was local, the majority of interviews were conducted via Skype. While participants were free to choose locations that were comfortable for them to video

chat from, I chose to conduct interviews from either my apartment or office, depending on the time of day. These locations were chosen as they are private and as such, protected participants' identities. The one in-person interview I conducted took place in a coffee shop near the participant's home. I had the participant choose the location to ensure her comfort and convenience.

I began the interviews by introducing myself and reading participants my oral consent script (Appendix C). A copy of the oral consent script, which included contact information for me, my advisor, and my university's Human Research Protection Program was sent to participants at the conclusion of the first interview. While I had prepared questions and prompts for the interview (Appendix D), I allowed participants to interpret questions freely and also asked questions based on the stories participants shared. This allowed participants to share what they felt was important, rather than conforming to my idea of their experience. When relevant, I also shared information about my own experiences with teaching and Japan to build rapport with participants and build a cooperative atmosphere.

Field notes concerning particularly striking moments in the interviews and my reactions to participants' stories were taken during the first interview, but they were taken only minimally to maintain a conversational atmosphere. More detailed field notes were taken during a second listening of interview recordings before the interviews were transcribed to help me gain perspective on how my positionality may affect my readings of the interviews and to point out which areas of the interview I may have overlooked because of my focus on other areas of it. After taking these field notes, interviews were transcribed. Both my field notes and transcriptions were used as field texts for analysis. Finally, I kept a journal throughout the first round of

interviews that included questions and wonderings I wanted to pursue during second interviews and potential connections between participants' stories and ideas I had learned in classes.

### 3.3.3 Second Interview

While I wanted to conduct second interviews as quickly as possible after first interviews to keep the stories shared as fresh in participants' minds as possible, there ended up being gaps of a few weeks between interviews. The 15-hour time difference between the US and Japan severely limited the times available to schedule interviews. Moreover, in addition to clarifying or digging deeper into stories shared in first interviews, I also wanted to be able to ask participants questions inspired by the stories shared by other participants in their first interviews during the second interviews. For this reason, I decided it was important for me to complete my first round of interviews before interviewing anyone a second time, even if it meant longer gaps between interviews. Thankfully, many participants actively alluded to their stories from previous interviews, indicating they were still relatively fresh in their minds.

The second interviews were conducted in the same locations and in the same manner as the first interviews. As with the first interviews, I developed list of potential questions or prompts to discuss with the participants (Appendix E). These prompts were developed based on the wonderings I encountered during my preliminary analysis of my field notes and transcriptions from the first interviews. Once again, I did not force participants to stick strictly to the prompts I developed, opting instead to let them guide the conversation toward stories they felt were important or prominent in their memories. Interestingly, many participants expressed interest in the stories other participants had shared, wanting to see if they had similar experiences or not. As I felt it might help participants recall further details of their own experiences or reflect on their experiences from a new perspective, I briefly shared some of my preliminary findings in

these moments. I was also careful to mention the diversity of experiences I heard about to prevent participants from feeling that their stories should fit a mold based on the stories of others. Field notes were once again taken during the interview and after during a secondary listening of the recording. Finally, participants were informed at the end of the interview that while this was the final interview, I would contact them again for any clarifications I may need or to have them look over my interpretation of their stories. Once the second round of interviews was completed, field texts were analyzed.

### 3.4 The Analytical Process

As mentioned previously, the analytical process began with listening to the interviews while taking notes on both interview content and my reactions to what I was hearing. I then compared these notes to the interview transcripts and highlighted the sections of the transcripts that appeared in my notes. I then looked back through the unhighlighted sections to see if there was relevant information that I overlooked during my initial review of the interviews. I updated my notes to include new findings. I then organized the notes from each interview into two groups related to the research questions of this study:

1. What assigned identities must ALTs navigate during their time with the JET Program?
2. How does the JET Program's purpose play out in reality?
3. What challenges do ALTs face during and after the JET Program?

Notes were color-coded by participant and combined by question. The data for each question was then coded into sub-categories. For Question 1, the categories that emerged were: every situation is different, every school is different, every teacher is different, somebody's watching you, images of foreigners, the predecessor effect, and training or lack thereof. These categories were later combined into two larger groups: expectations from all stakeholders and other factors



that shape ALT identities. For Question 2, the categories that emerged were: the ostensible versus the real purpose of the JET Program, those who seek will find work, structured community involvement, and unstructured community involvement. Information related to Question 3's focus on challenges after the JET Program was specific enough that the data did not need to be broken down into further categories. Furthermore, data related to challenges during the JET Program tended to supplement categories from Question 1 and Question 2. The results of analysis are presented in Chapter Four.

### 3.5 Summary of Chapter Three

This chapter introduced the methodology of the study, including a brief overview of the study, a description of narrative inquiry, and research positionality. It then explained the limitations of narrative inquiry. Brief introductions of participants were provided and the two-round interview process was described in detail. Finally, methods for analysis were explained. Chapter Four will present the analysis of data collected during this study.

## Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter focuses on the analysis of interview data. First, the analyzed data is presented, organized by themes such as expectations for ALTs, factors that shape ALTs identities, the reality of the JET Program, and the challenges ALTs face after the JET Program. Then, the chapter discusses perceived challenges faced by ALTs that emerged through the data analysis process.

### 4.1 Expectations from all Stakeholders

ALTs must deal with a variety of expectations during their time with the JET Program ranging from the expectations of their schools and the JTEs they teach with to the expectations of the community they live in. These expectations create a complex and unique matrix within which each ALT resides and which helps shape ALTs actions and experiences. In order to understand ALTs' stories, it is important to first analyze these expectations.

#### 4.1.1 Every Situation is Different

When discussing life as a JET Program ALT, the adage, "Every situation is different," commonly referred to as "ESID" by JET Program participants, is bound to come up, probably multiple times. It appears all over JET Program forums, articles about the JET Program, and the JET Program's training sessions. Even though the sample size for this study is small, looking at the situations of its participants, it is easy to see the diversity of ALTs' situations. ALTs can work at various numbers of schools. Mark works at only two schools, an integrated middle and high school, so he doesn't have to travel between schools. On the other end of the spectrum, Amanda worked at ten elementary and middle schools, with preschools occasionally added in as well. Mark's position at a combined middle school and high school is also interesting because usually ALTs either teach in high schools exclusively or a combination of elementary and middle

schools. This may, in fact, be one of the most consistent features of the JET Program, but Mark's situation shows that there are even exceptions in this realm. Moreover, as alluded to earlier, ALTs teach at a variety of grade levels. Naturally, different grade levels have different curricula and different expectations, which affect ALTs' responsibilities and classroom experiences. Furthermore, Jon pointed out that while ALTs at middle schools and elementary schools are hired by local BoEs, high school ALTs are hired by prefectural governments, so everything is "completely different" for them (Jon, first interview, January 29, 2018). Finally, the schools, co-teachers, and students themselves also make every ALT experience unique, as will be discussed in more detail below.

In addition to disparities within their schools, ALTs face disparities outside of their schools. Their placements span the country with some ALTs placed in rural areas, like Amanda in her town of 15,000, and others placed in urban/suburban areas, like Jacob in his city of 200,000. Some are placed in areas with rich histories of ALTs and multiple concurrent ALT placements. Others find themselves in newer placements. Some are placed in areas with considerable public transportation. Others have to drive to work and to friends' homes. Additionally, each placement has a variety of unique traits ranging from the number of other foreign workers in the area to the availability of services in English to the number and diversity of community organizations and events. All of these aspects combine to create singular experiences for all ALTs. Therefore, while we may be able to find commonalities among some or even most ALTs' stories, we must also recognize that there is no definitive ALT experience when it comes to the JET Program. We must treat everyone's stories as individual and accept that even though ALTs are all part of the JET Program, the greatest connection between their experiences is the idea of "ESID."

### *Every School is Different*

While talking about her experiences teaching in various schools, Rachel suddenly said, “I just realized that ESID works for schools, too. Every school is different,” (Rachel, first interview, February 6, 2018). As ALTs go around teaching at different schools, they encounter different curricula, different administrations, and even different grade levels. As such, the expectations and duties of ALTs can vary greatly from school to school. Rachel’s, “Every school is different,” was prompted by reflection on her role in the classroom in her elementary schools versus her middle schools. She shared that you can always be the lead teacher in elementary school, if you show that you’re capable, but that at the middle schools, she is usually placed in the role of tape recorder, simply reading passages aloud when asked to demonstrate a native speaker’s pronunciation (Rachel, first interview, February 6, 2018). In other words, Rachel’s role in the class changes drastically throughout her week, depending on the school she is teaching at on a particular day. Even within the same level of schools, however, her responsibilities vary. In particular, at the elementary school level, there are some days where she is co-teaching and other days when she is expected to teach alone (Rachel, first interview, February 6, 2018). This adds another level of inconsistency throughout her week. Time at each school and the trust of JTEs that develops gradually when working together also plays a role in defining her duties, which have varied over time. Rachel noted that lessons were completely planned out at her first elementary school, but more recently she has been given the opportunity to plan lessons for all holidays (Rachel, first interview, February 6, 2018). Rachel also noted that while she had little responsibility and considerable free time during her first year with the JET Program, her responsibilities increased dramatically during her second year, and she started planning all the lessons for first through fifth grade (Rachel, first interview, February 6, 2018). Duties changing

within schools over time means that even if Rachel were to grow accustomed to the differences in her responsibilities between schools, there are always new expectations to which she has to adjust.

Samantha noted similar differences between her elementary and middle schools. She is the head teacher at her elementary schools, where she makes all the lesson plans and explains them to her JTEs (Samantha, first interview, January 26, 2018). In contrast, at her middle school there is, “definitely a heavy emphasis on the assistant part of the job,” (Samantha, first interview, January 26, 2018). She also mentioned, like Rachel, being primarily utilized as a tape recorder at her middle school (Samantha, first interview, January 26, 2018). Thus, Samantha also has to navigate a different role depending on the school she is at each day. Interestingly, Samantha also mentioned that her middle school has special education classes. For the two special education classes she is involved with, Samantha is, “planning the lessons more or less” (Samantha, first interview, January 26, 2018). As a result, even within a single school, depending on the nature of the class, Samantha’s role changes. Samantha too noticed an increase in responsibility at her middle schools over time, further supporting the idea that level of responsibility is inconsistent and generally increases with experience (Samantha, first interview, January 26, 2018). Consequently, Samantha has also had to navigate different ascribed roles in different dimensions during her time as an ALT.

Jon also taught at the elementary school and middle school levels, and experienced disparity between responsibilities depending on school level. At the elementary school level, Jon was in charge of creating the curriculum, while he was treated like “a robot” at the middle school level (Jon, first interview, January 29, 2018). In addition to differences depending on grade level, Jon also recognized differences between his regular middle school and integrated middle and

elementary school. While he was treated like a robot at both schools, he felt that he had comparatively more responsibility at the regular middle school (Jon, first interview, January 29, 2018). As a result, he also had to negotiate different roles across the same grades. Having been placed in the same school for two years, Jon also noticed that people asked more of him the longer he was at the school (Jon, first interview, January 29, 2018). This means that while changes in responsibility naturally occur if ALTs rotate schools during April school rotations, changes in responsibility also happen if they don't rotate.

Jacob also acts as the lead teacher in his elementary school classes, preparing and teaching everything for first through fourth grade (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018). At the middle school level, however, his duties range greatly from simply grading things and acting as a tape recorder to playing an active role in the class (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018). The variation in his duties at the middle school level greatly depends on the teacher he is working with, so it will be discussed in more detail in the next section. Regardless, there is a clear inconsistency between his roles at the elementary level and middle school level. His level of responsibility has also increased over time, and he specifically mentioned that he has been entrusted with more grading over time (Jacob, interview, first January 27, 2018). Jacob has not seen as dramatic an increase in responsibilities as other participants, but that may be because it's still his first year working as an ALT. Still, it's important to note that even within his first six months as an ALT, he's noticed an increase in responsibility, indicating that even gaining only a few months of experience can lead to changes for ALTs.

Amanda also held a prominent role at her elementary schools. She created the curriculum and lessons and was able to introduce new features to the curriculum she felt would benefit student learning. For example, she introduced English folders to help students retain what they'd

learned even though they only had English class with her once a week (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). Meanwhile, in her middle school classrooms, she took on the role of assistant and experienced considerably less freedom (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). She attributed this difference to general differences between elementary schools and middle schools, rather than differences specific to her schools. Elementary school teachers aren't trained in English, so they're, "terrified," and let ALTs take charge because they see them as more qualified (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). At the same time, at the middle school level, teachers must prepare their students for exams, so they can't make as much space for ALTs (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). Considering the consistency of more main roles in elementary schools and more peripheral roles in middle schools across participants, it is likely that external factors such as qualifications and testing play a part in diversifying ALT roles (Galloway, 2009; McConnell, 2000).

Mark is in an interesting position because he is able to compare his role across middle school and high school, a less common pair. He has also found differences. His main responsibilities at the middle school level are peripheral duties such as checking JTEs' pronunciation and creating worksheets (Mark, first interview, January 27, 2018). At the high school level, he usually creates entire lessons (Mark, first interview, January 27, 2018). Therefore, even though Mark's middle school and high school are integrated, he still experiences varying expectations and has to navigate diverse roles. He also noted that his duties on the whole have increased over time, but how they have increased and how much they have increased depended greatly on the teacher (Mark, second interview, February 24, 2018). The influence JTEs have on ALTs' duties will be explored in greater detail in the next section.

Finally, Chris only teaches at high schools, so he hasn't experience different levels of responsibility depending on school level. His experiences at his high schools are similar to Mark's experiences. He also creates his own curriculum and lessons and teaches his lessons alone (Chris, first interview, February 9, 2018). He enjoys having freedom to teach students what he thinks will benefit them (Chris, first interview, February 9, 2018). While Chris may have similar levels of responsibilities across schools since he only teaches at high schools, he has noticed differences in how he is treated. Chris has one base school and two visit schools. He spends considerably more time at his base school than at his visit schools. As a result, his visit schools view him more as a visiting or substitute teacher, while his base school views him as a regular teacher (Chris, second interview, February 24, 2018). A specific example of this is that his visit schools will let him go home as soon as he finishes his work, while he is expected to stay at least until the end of his work day at his base school (Chris, second interview, February 24, 2018). From these data, it is clear that how ALTs are viewed and the nature of their perceived responsibilities differs based on ALTs' local school contexts. This reflects the contextual nature of identity (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Feryok, 2012; Ricento, 2005; Varghese et al., 2005). Rather than being static and monolithic, ALTs identities change depending on the school at which they are teaching each day.

### *Every JTE is Different*

As alluded to earlier, in addition to every school being different, every JTE whom ALTs work with is different. In addition to having their own teaching styles, every JTE has different expectations for ALTs and different levels of experience with team-teaching (McConnell, 2000). These differences can lead to different roles and responsibilities for ALTs class-to-class in addition to school-to-school. Rachel most strongly felt the difference between JTEs and their



expectations at the middle school level, stating that some teachers try to make her the lead teacher, while other teachers don't utilize her at all (Rachel, first interview, February 6, 2018). More specifically, the JTE for first year students will use her activities or, "pull from [her] bag of ideas occasionally," while the JTE for third year students usually just tells her what to do and will even remove Rachel's contributions from lesson plans if she feels they haven't discussed them enough (Rachel, first interview, February 6, 2018). The great disparity between these experiences places Rachel in a difficult situation, as she has to regularly negotiate her role in the classroom. It has even led to doubts at times as to the nature of her position, leaving her wondering if she is a teacher or not (Rachel, first interview, February 6, 2018). Because every teacher has a unique style of teaching and different lesson plans, it is only natural that ALTs would be utilized differently depending on who they're working with. At the same time, however, Rachel's doubts show that too much variation can make it difficult for ALTs to understand their identity.

Samantha has had fairly consistent experiences teacher-to-teacher at the elementary school level. The main difference she has found is that some teachers assist more, while the majority just translate occasionally (Samantha, first interview, January 26, 2018). While this changes the classroom dynamic slightly, her position as head teacher stays consistent throughout elementary school classes. Samantha's experience at the middle school level, however, has showed more variance. At the middle school level, Samantha generally experiences low expectations from the JTEs with whom she works (Samantha, second interview, February 16, 2018). One JTE in particular, however, utilizes her more effectively by asking her to lead activities occasionally and giving her grading to do (Samantha, first interview, January 26, 2018). Samantha's involvement is also higher in one specific class because her principal

encouraged her to create engaging activities to combat the class's rowdiness (Samantha, first interview, January 26, 2018). These experiences show the correlation between other teachers and administration recognizing the ability of ALTs and increased responsibility. When ALTs' abilities and value are recognized, the door is opened for them to contribute actively to the classroom.

Jon also recognized that his role in the classroom at his middle schools changed depending on the teacher. Specifically, he mentioned, "depending on the teacher, it was different how much push and pull I had in the classroom and how much advice I could give the teacher on their lessons," (Jon, first interview, January 29, 2018). Jon's experiences show that JTEs do not just have power over how involved ALTs are in the execution of lessons. They also hold sway over how involved ALTs are in designing lessons and even giving opinions on lessons. When JTEs have different opinions regarding ALTs' roles in each of these realms, ALTs' roles can differ greatly. For some teachers, Jon attributed these different views on how involved ALTs should be in the classroom to feelings of a power struggle in the classroom. He felt that some of the JTEs he worked with were threatened by the presence of a male, native speaker in their classroom and responded by limiting his power (Jon, first interview, January 29, 2018). While JTEs generally have more training in and experience with teaching, participants' experiences show that ALTs' status as native speakers and language models may cause some JTEs to feel that their authority as English teachers is threatened due to their status as NNESTs (Mahoney, 2004; Miyazato 2009; Pennycook, 2001; Phillipson, 1992). Miyazato (2009) specifically recognized this power struggle when looking at power sharing in team-teaching in the JET Program. It is also important to recognize Jon's intersectional identity as both a NEST and a male. Many Japanese students see male NESTs as ideal English teachers (Rivers & Ross, 2013).

Therefore, both Jon's status as a native speaker and a male may be seen as threatening the power of JTEs. Certainly not all JTEs feel this way, however, and those that do surely react differently to these feelings. This adds another dimension that affects how ALTs' positions are viewed.

Jacob has found that the JTEs for first grade students and third grade students in his middle schools utilize him in very different ways. While he plays an active role in first and second grade classes, he takes on a more periphery role in third grade classes because they are preparing for testing (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018). Focus on testing can greatly decrease the perceived value of ALTs in the classroom, as tests generally do not include speaking sections. Therefore, some teachers give priority to their grammar explanations and test preparation over including communicative activities led by ALTs. McConnell (2000)'s in-depth study of the JET Program also found that teachers would occasionally cancel team-taught lessons in order to create more time to prepare students for exams. Jacob explained, however, that his different roles are not only the result of testing. One of the first grade teachers has experience working with ALTs, so he is able to integrate Jacob into his classes more effectively (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018). Team-teaching, particularly with ALTs who lack formal teaching experience, is challenging, as it brings a new dynamic into the classroom. It is possible that depth of understanding of how to team-teach effectively or level of confidence in team-teaching can also affect how JTEs understand the role of ALTs and how they utilize ALTs in the classroom (Johannes, 2012). As a result, teachers with different depths of understanding and levels of confidence will ascribe different responsibilities to ALTs. Jacob is also frustrated by a specific inconsistency he encounters among his teachers. While he is able to speak some Japanese in his first and second grade classes, particularly when explaining grammar, he is strictly forbidden from using Japanese in his third year classes (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018). Disparity

in beliefs concerning native English speakers using Japanese in the classroom may seem like a minor difference, but it can have a profound effect on ALTs. JTEs' opinions on this point shape how ALTs interact with students in the classroom and differences can become a source of frustration if ALTs find using Japanese helpful in one class and are not allowed to use this resource in another class. Furthermore, this disparity may be indicative of the power struggle between NESTs and NNESTs. ALTs are brought to Japan because of their ability to speak native English (Phillipson, 1992). As NNESTs, JTEs are able to center their power on their native Japanese language skills and cultural knowledge (Kubota, 2009; Miyazato, 2009). Speaking Japanese in class may be seen disrupting the delicate balance of power in team-teaching. Ideological differences among teachers present another dimension for ALTs to navigate class-to-class.

Amanda also mentioned how the JTEs she worked with at her middle schools varied in their expectations for her, which served as a point of frustration. While some teachers collaborated with her, some only wanted her to, "say or do certain things" (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). Amanda found this lack of power frustrating because she knew more could be accomplished through working together with her JTE (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). Similar to Jacob's frustration concerning his ability to use Japanese in some classrooms, Amanda found her inability to work alongside her JTEs in some classes discouraging because she had seen how beneficial it was in other classes. Johannes (2012) also found that many ALTs found it frustrating that they were not as involved in lessons as they felt they should be when studying team-teaching dynamics in the JET Program. Ultimately, teachers assigning different roles to ALTs is not only challenging because ALTs must navigate these differences, but also because ALTs experience all of these roles and understand which are the

most beneficial for students' educations, but do not always have the power to take on the roles they feel they should.

Mark has experienced different expectations at his schools, reporting that his duties and amount of work vary greatly depending on the teacher (Mark, second interview, February 24, 2018). He commented that some teachers expect him to come in knowing nothing and, accordingly, plan on him taking on the role of assistant, while others prefer for him to take over the class (Mark, first interview, January 27, 2018). This distinction is reminiscent of Samantha's point that some teachers have low expectations for ALTs, causing JTEs to underutilize ALTs. Mark also pointed out how the different teaching styles between teachers can affect ALTs. Because classes are run by different teachers, "they're all designed slightly differently... You might cover the same story, but the two teachers want to approach it completely different ways," (Mark, first interview, January 27, 2018). When teachers conduct their classrooms and lessons in different ways, ALTs must determine how they fit into the different classes. Even if teachers are teaching the same topic to the same level and have similar ideas about the roles of ALTs, differing approaches for lessons make it so that ALTs must adjust their actions to fit in with the specifics of each class.

Finally, Chris has had fewer experiences with taking on different roles as a reaction to the JTEs with whom he worked. The main reason for this is that he designs his lessons so he can teach them alone because he, "[doesn't] like sharing [them]," (Chris, first interview, February 9, 2018). His ability to take on the role of head teacher at the high school level relates to Mahoney (2004)'s findings that JTEs are more willing to have ALTs lead classes at the high school level than at the middle school level. As a result, Chris is able to define his identity in the classroom on his own terms by placing JTEs in a periphery role. He did mention differences in his role

based on the type of class, however. Mark is involved in both conversation and expression classes. While he can teach independently in communication classes, it is more common for him to teach alongside JTEs in expression classes because they have a greater focus on grammar (Chris, first interview, February 9, 2018). Clearly, the purpose of classes can also affect how teachers interpret the role of ALTs. This difference plays to the strengths NNESTs, who have experience explicitly learning English grammar, and NESTs, who encourage students to speak English due to their native speaker status (Kubota, 2009; Mahoney, 2004). As such, it is theoretically possible for a teacher who is involved in both expression and communication classes to have different views of what ALTs should be doing in the classroom depending on which class is being discussed. These opinions would once again affect the ALTs involved and help define their actions in the classroom.

In summary, the school situations of each ALT are unique with differences ranging from grade level to JTEs' training in English education and team-teaching. This variance corresponds to Mahoney (2004)'s study on team teaching in the JET Program, in which ALTs noted how inconsistency in schools' and JTEs' expectations caused their roles to be different depending on both their schools and specific classes. These differences create the individual situations through which ALTs must negotiate their identities. Moreover, ALTs do not simply need to define their identity in the classroom once and then carry this identity with them throughout their time with the JET Program. The schools at which ALTs teach can change. JTEs' views on the capabilities and roles of ALTs can change. The specific classes ALTs are involved in can change. As each of these factors changes, which in the case of factors such as co-teachers and classes can change multiple times throughout the day, ALTs must renegotiate their identities. This makes for a complicated and continuous process of identity formation and maintenance.

#### 4.1.2 Somebody's Watching You

Schools are not the only presence that ascribe expectations and roles to ALTs. ALTs are called to act not only as English teachers, but as cultural ambassadors as well. This makes them prominent members of their local communities. While in these communities, ALTs must also face the expectations and roles ascribed to them by community members. Effectively, due to the dual teacher and ambassador nature of the position, with the exclusion of when they're alone in their homes, ALTs are constantly living out their ALT identity. When they're in school, they're acting as teachers and cultural ambassadors to their coworkers and students, and when they're out of school, they're acting as cultural ambassadors to their local communities. While the previous section discussed ALTs during their time at school, it is also important to consider their visibility and how they are viewed by community members.

All participants mentioned their visibility in the community. Because Samantha lives close to her schools, she regularly runs into students at places like the grocery store (Samantha, first interview, January 26, 2018). Recently members of the community have started greeting Mark when they see him out and about (Mark, first interview, January 27, 2018). For some, like Rachel and Chris, these small interactions and visibility make them feel like part of the community (Rachel, second interview, March 7, 2018; Chris, first interview, February 9, 2018). For Amanda, they made her feel, "noticed and important," (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). Being an ALT makes you more than a, "random *gaijin* (foreigner)" (Jacob, second interview, February 16, 2018). Lack of anonymity makes ALTs more than simple tourists. It shows that they're a fixed existence in the community and play a role that people recognize and support, even if it's just through simple greetings. This can enhance ALTs experiences by giving them purpose and helping them build connections outside of school. At the same time, this level

of visibility can present challenges for ALTs by extending their roles out of their classrooms and into their communities. Furthermore, ALTs must embody a various social and cultural roles simultaneously as they are seen not only as ALTs, but also as community members, foreigners, and cultural examples of their home cultures (Duff & Uchida, 1997).

Early on in his time as an ALT, Jacob became somewhat of a “local celebrity” (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018). In addition to being easily recognizable as a foreigner, it is easy for the community to recognize him as an ALT because ALTs are the only foreigners in his area (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018). This means that in addition to taking on the passive cultural ambassador role afforded to all visitors to foreign countries, Jacob’s formal role as a cultural ambassador and ALT is apparent to the community. Jacob commented that being easily recognizable in this way comes with both advantages and disadvantages (Jacob, second interview, February 16, 2018). While it is fun to interact with students and the community around town, there is a certain level of responsibility that came with this identifiability (Jacob, second interview, February 16, 2018). When everyone around you knows who you are and has an idea about what you should be doing, you have to constantly be respectable and recognize that you can’t do anything you wouldn’t want others to see because all eyes are on you (Jacob, second interview, February 16, 2018). The eyes and expectations of the community can affect how ALTs represent themselves in their everyday lives (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Feryok, 2012). Expectations for them and how they act don’t stay in the classroom. The expectations and roles ascribed to ALTs by their community present another realm in which ALTs must negotiate their identities.

Jon also felt the negative effects of being easily identifiable. He felt, “constantly watched,” and stated he, “couldn’t hide in the shadow of a car,” (Jon, first interview, January 29,



2018). There was pressure for him to act in ways befitting of an ALT, and there was no escape from these expectations. Specifically, Jon related an episode where he was asked to stop longboarding in public, a hobby of his, because he was a government employee and skateboarding is viewed negatively in Japan (Jon, first interview, January 29, 2018). This presents an interesting dilemma in which Jon had to choose between sacrificing part of his private identity, a favorite hobby, or actively going against his ascribed identity as an ALT. In the end, he decided to keep longboarding, since it was only objectionable because of prejudice, and ended up teaching his principal how to longboard (Jon, first interview, January 29, 2018). In this case, Jon chose to prioritize his private identity. While this may not appear to be a major incident at first, it is representative of the many small identity dilemmas ALTs must navigate during their time with the JET Program. While these negotiations may be uneventful on the surface, they can serve as a source of great tension for ALTs.

Amanda provided more examples of feeling pressure to change behavior based on the eyes of others. Once again, while she did feel, “noticed and important,” under the gaze of the community, she also felt that, “People are always watching you, viewing you, and judging you,” (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). ALTs must grapple with the dual nature of the community’s eyes. The negative nature can make ALTs feel self-conscious about their behavior. Amanda never drank at her town’s festivals and stopped going to the local hot springs because she felt uncomfortable doing these things around her students and their families (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). Unlike Jon with the longboarding episode, Amanda chose to prioritize her identity as an ALT in these situations over her private identity. This choice became even more clear when she discussed the difference she felt when she was in her town and when she was travelling. Amanda introduced me to the phrase, “It’s not my town,” which she used

with other members of the JET community to describe how ALTs don't feel the same pressure from community eyes when they're travelling than when they are at home and how they can be more of themselves when they are in a different town due to the anonymity travelling affords (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). The idea of, "It's not my town," shows that ALTs negotiate their identity differently when they're in their local community and when they are away and have the freedom to act based on their private identity. Amanda also mentioned that the constant pressure to be on your best behavior and to act in a certain way can take a severe emotional toll on ALTs and attributed the large number of ALTs who become depressed to this phenomenon (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). Identity negotiation in the community is an ongoing process which can be a major challenge for ALTs.

While ALTs' roles may be more clearly defined in the context of a classroom or school and ALTs are technically not working when out in the community, their identity is still not completely their own. Their students, their students' families, the community is always watching them and interpreting their actions through their own beliefs about what ALTs should and should not do, how ALTs should and should not act. ALTs must consider these expectations and decide how they are going to react to them (Duff & Uchida, 1997). For some, they may try to meet all expectations, centering their identity in their public face, while others may place less value on the eyes of the public and instead focus on their personal identity. For most, they will seek a balance between what they feel the community expects and what they would do if they were an anonymous foreigner. This requires negotiation of identity in the community, in addition to the identity negotiation in the classroom as discussed previously.

#### 4.1.3 Images of Foreigners

Finally, it is important to recognize that both in their position as NESTs and as cultural ambassadors, ALTs are defined by their status as foreigners bringing their language and culture to Japan. In order to understand what this means with respect to the identities ascribed to ALTs, we need to consider Japanese people's images of foreigners and, more specifically, English-speaking foreigners. Japan generally has a narrow view of what English-speaking foreigners should look like, which adds another layer to ALTs' identity negotiation depending on whether they fit this mold or not.

When discussing his early experiences as an ALT, Jon stated, "I don't think anyone in my program expected me to be black," (Jon, first interview, January 29, 2018). This corresponds to McConnell (2000)'s study, which found that many schools expect a white face when they hire ALTs. Jon further elaborated that in his experiences, Japanese people tended to equate native English speakers with the image of a blond-haired, blue-eyed foreigner (Jon, second interview, February 26, 2018). The people at Jon's schools were even more likely to assume that he was white because he's American. Jon found that for most Japanese people, "white people are always supposed to be from America," so many people assumed he was African when they first met him (Jon, first interview, January 29, 2018). This idea is supported by Sekiguchi's (2002) observation that Japanese people tend to think that white people should be American and Americans should be white. Furthermore, black foreigners and black society are largely invisible in the Japanese people's minds (Rivers & Ross, 2013). Therefore, not fitting the traditional foreigner mold can be beneficial in introducing Japanese people to diverse visions of foreigners, as will be discussed in more detail in 4.2. However, it also places ALTs like Jon in a curious position. They were hired because they're English native speakers, but they don't fit the traditional native speaker mold. These ALTs must navigate those around them questioning their origins and identity.

Moreover, not matching the traditional English speaker image can also affect ALTs' perceived identities and roles, further complicating ALTs' identity negotiation.

Chris reported similar experiences since he also doesn't fit the, "tall, blond, white, blue-eyed foreigner," image (Chris, second interview February 24, 2018). He is often told that he, "doesn't look British," and deals with ignorant comments such as, "But you're black. You can't be from Britain," (Chris, second interview, February 24, 2018). While Chris takes these interactions in stride and finds the humor in them, they do make him feel that, "Stereotypes are very strong in Japan in the way they see the world outside," (Chris, second interview, February 24, 2018). These stereotypes can present challenges for ALTs, as they must either play into the stereotypes or work to change them, surely answering a variety of bewildered questions along the way. Choosing between playing into stereotypes and working to change them presents another way in which ALTs must negotiate their identity based on the expectations of those around them. Chris also experiences not fitting the traditional foreigner mold due to being British. He found many Japanese people equate English speakers and Americans, and American English is the default in Japan (Chris, second interview, February 24, 2018). This again, fits into Sekiguchi's (2002) equivalency of foreigners and Americans. Consequently, Chris feels pressure to change the way he writes and speaks to match the expectations of JTEs and students (Chris, second interview, February 24, 2018). In the end, he has decided to take this as an opportunity to present alternatives and explain that there are multiple acceptable ways to speak and write English (Chris, second interview, February 24, 2018). In this way, he is able to create a bridge between Japan's image of English speakers and his own identity.

Amanda also touched on the challenges ALTs may face when their appearance doesn't match with Japanese people's expectations. While Amanda is white, her best friend from the JET

Program is black and she noticed that they were perceived differently by those around them (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). Even though she wasn't the traditional shape of white women that Japanese people imagined, she still received a more positive gaze from the community than her friend (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). Amanda noticed that Japanese people would avoid sitting next to her friend on public transportation, but that they didn't act in the same way with her (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). This contrast further shows how race plays into how ALTs are viewed by the community and the identities community members ascribe to ALTs (McConnell 2000). Amanda also pointed out that because her appearance was in agreement with the foreigner image in some ways, she was expected to act in the way Japanese people anticipated (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). Specifically, as a white woman, she was expected to and felt pressure to be always welcoming and smiling (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). This is another example of a stereotype through which many Japanese people see the world. In these situations, as well, ALTs must decide if they will play into the role expected of them or act in accordance with their own personalities.

Rachel added another dimension to the discussion by mentioning the difference between how men and women are perceived. Even if we limit our scope to blond-haired, blue-eyed Americans, males are at the top (Rachel, second interview, March 7, 2018). Rivers and Ross (2013) also found this to be true when they surveyed Japanese university students on their preferred traits when it came to NESTs. Rachel felt this most strongly when she compared how her schools treated her, a white female, with how they treated her predecessor, a white male. Even though her predecessor did not work particularly hard, she saw that he received better treatment because he matched the ideal NEST idea (Rachel, second interview, March 7, 2018).

Rachel attributed this to the idea that, “a lot of places pay just to have a foreigner-looking thing,” (Rachel, second interview, March 7, 2018). Based on this premise, looking like the ideal foreigner means that you’re doing your job well and are deserving of better treatment. Wherever this ideology holds true, ALTs appearances affects how their actions are perceived and what identities are ascribed to them. Furthermore, if ALTs are shown that their “appropriate foreigner image” leads to greater acceptance and better treatment, the choices they make that would move them closer or farther from this image will be affected. For example, Rachel stated, “Sometimes I blond my hair with lemon juice just to make sure I stay foreign because that’s all I have going for me,” (Rachel, second interview, March 7, 2018). While this was said partially in jest, it shows the pressure that results when ALTs are faced with prescribed roles and images.

In summary, Japan has a common and narrow idea of what a foreigner, and particularly what an English-speaking foreigner, should look like. White, middle-class, American, male foreigners are both the expectation and the ideal (Galloway 2009; Rivers & Ross, 2013). Along with these images comes expected actions and personality traits. For example, being a white woman, Amanda was expected to be welcoming and smiling. McConnell (2000) shared another example of this stereotyping for a black ALT who was expected to speak exclusively the “black dialect” and not know standard English. This image of a foreigner shapes how ALTs are perceived and consequently treated by those around them. The effect further extends to what identity and roles are prescribed to ALTs. Therefore, this foreigner image and how closely ALTs do or do not match it plays a role in ALTs’ identity negotiation and actions and should be considered when examining the identities ascribed to ALTs and their experiences.

#### 4.2 Other Factors that Shape ALT Identity

While ALTs' situations and the differences between their situations play a large role in shaping ALT identity, they are not the only factors at play in this process. Factors such as their predecessors, training, and community of practice also take on major roles. Therefore, it is important to look at how their effect on ALTs before considering the specific actions taken by ALTs in their identity negotiation process.

#### 4.2.1 The Predecessor Effect

Predecessors have a great effect on ALTs through the support they provide, the relationships they developed at their schools, and the mistakes they made. That being said, every predecessor is different and the situation with every predecessor is different. For some, the ALT that taught at their school the previous year may simply be teaching at a different school in the area that year, making them easily accessible as a resource. For others, their direct predecessors may have already returned to their home countries. For this reason, the most common support received from predecessor among this study's participants came in the form of lesson plans and textbooks. Because Chris's school has a rich history of ALTs, he was given a flash drive with ten years' worth of lesson plans upon his arrival at his school (Chris, first interview, February 9, 2018). Jacob was left with a variety of textbooks and activities to sort through (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018). Amanda's predecessor left so much that it was a task to sift through it all (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2017). While it may not have been a direct predecessor, one of Samantha's predecessors saved old lesson plans on the office computer, so she could use them for reference (Samantha, first interview, January 26, 2018). Through these resources, predecessors can shape the way ALTs teach and what they contribute to the classroom. Old lesson plans and activities can act as a basis for current ALTs' lessons and activities or can be copied over directly. The nature of the lesson plans and activities also help

ALTs understand the role their predecessor played in the classroom during their time at the school. This can shape ALTs' expectations for their roles.

At the same time, it is important to note that not all ALTs use the resources left for them in the same way or even at all. Samantha went through the lesson plans left for her, and selected the activities she liked and used other activities as a basis for her own lessons (Samantha, first interview, January 26, 2018). Jacob also went through and modified the games he found with ideas of his own (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018). In these cases, their predecessors' choices and actions affected their teaching by acting as a base for them to work from. At the same time, they were able to assert their own identity and autonomy by being selective with activities and altering them as they saw fit. In Jacob's case, the effect of his predecessor is mitigated slightly, however, by his JTEs. Because his JTEs usually give him lesson plans that they've prepared for him to follow, he rarely uses the games he modified (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018). This shows that while predecessors do affect ALTs teaching, their effect does not exist in a vacuum and is subject to all the other forces that affect ALTs teaching as well. In Amanda's case, while she occasionally took ideas from her predecessor's materials, she didn't take many because she wanted to step away from the work of her predecessor and make her own mark (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). She negotiated her identity by separating herself from her predecessor and making her own way. Chris also chose to not use the lessons left by his predecessor because he saw them as, "childish," (Chris, first interview, February 9, 2018). Hence, the effect of predecessors on current ALTs lessons is not always the sharing of activities. Sometimes the effect is becoming an antithesis against which ALTs can foster their own identity.



In addition to the realm of lesson planning, predecessors also create a foundation in schools from which ALTs work. Jon commented that, “Your predecessor matters a lot,” precisely because they can leave a solid foundation for you and help you get acclimated to your new situation, but don’t always (Jon, first interview, January 29, 2018). This dynamic is seen mostly clearly when considering the relationship between predecessors and the school and the roles predecessors took on at the school. When predecessors were viewed positively by the school, teachers and the administration may hope and even expect for new ALTs to take on the same roles and act in the same ways. Amanda noted at her various schools that some teachers wanted her to do exactly what her predecessor did, which left no space for her to be herself (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). In this situation, her predecessor’s actions shaped the role that ALTs should play in the minds of her coworkers. They then tried to apply this template to Amanda as well due to its perceived success in the past. Amanda then had to decide whether she would adjust herself so she fit that perception and sacrifice a part of herself in the process or somehow navigate this perception in an effort to maintain her self-identity. In the end, Amanda successfully navigated this and made her own mark on her schools. Many ALTs face similar challenges, but their success in navigating this dynamic and how they navigate it depends greatly on the person.

Rachel’s predecessor regularly planned all lessons, so Rachel’s JTEs expect the same from her (Rachel, first interview, February 6, 2018). While Rachel may not always feel comfortable with the level of responsibility placed on her because she feels she should be more of an assistant, in her navigation of this situation, she chooses to conform to the actions of her predecessor. Rachel’s case is particularly interesting because of the historic reputation of ALTs in her area. Rachel’s prefecture is famous for having ALTs that go above and beyond in their

teaching and stay with the JET Program until they reach their contract limit (Rachel, first interview, February 6, 2018). In addition to affecting the perception of ALTs and their roles on the part of schools, experienced JETs in the area have adopted this image and regularly push it on new ALTs, including Rachel when she first started. She mentioned they constantly remind her that her city is known for having the, “best ALTs,” (Rachel, second interview, March 7, 2018). In this situation, years’ worth of predecessors created an image for the city and the prefecture. If ALTs want to identify themselves as ALTs of this prefecture and of this city, they encounter pressure to act in ways that are in accordance with this image. To not do so would be to differentiate their identity from that of other ALTs in the prefecture to a certain extent. Thus, the overarching images and expectations created by predecessors can also create an identity that ALTs must navigate.

Conversely, predecessors may have had negative relationships with their schools, which affect ALTs in a different way. Jacob’s predecessor was a hard worker, was fluent in Japanese, and wanted to be treated in the same way as fulltime teachers (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018). This was seen as too much by the school, so they specifically requested that Jacob not work as hard and just work his hours (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018). In this case, Jacob’s predecessor’s actions still affect how his role is perceived at school by placing his predecessor as a negative example. This gives Jacob direction in how his school wants him to form his identity, but also gives him considerable freedom as he has one thing he shouldn’t do instead of a list of things he should do, as with Amanda and Rachel. In summary, the exact way predecessors’ actions affect schools’ expectations for ALTs can differ greatly in nature and in how specific of ascribed identities they produce.

Finally, predecessors can affect the lives of ALTs through the repercussions of the mistakes they make. The very first JET in Amanda's city, who was male, was caught driving drunk, so the city took away the car they originally provided from all future ALTs and only accepted female ALTs from that point continuing to now (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). The effect of this incident on Amanda was twofold. In addition to preventing her from being provided a car, it also caused her to consider her own actions more carefully, so she wouldn't repeat the same failures as her predecessor (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). She mentioned that on the JET Program, "Everything you do has repercussions; everything you do will affect those who come after you," (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). Understanding this and experiencing this directly affects the choices ALTs make. As she actively avoided making mistakes that would affect the ALTs that came after her, Amanda built her identity in contrast to her predecessor. Furthermore, by avoiding such mistakes, Amanda had to navigate different expectations to become what she felt was an acceptable ALT.

To summarize, predecessors affect ALTs actions and identity formation in a variety of ways. They can create materials and lessons that become the basis for ALTs' materials and lessons. They can become models that JTEs and administrators then apply to ALTs. They can become counterexamples ALTs must define themselves against. They can make mistakes that restrict ALTs' actions. Moreover, this effect is not limited to recent predecessors. Predecessors' effects can still be felt years after they leave the JET Program. As a result, the predecessor effect must be considered carefully when looking at ALTs' identities.

#### 4.2.2 Official and Unofficial Training

The JET Program does not require ALTs to come into the program with training in education. As a result, many assume that the JET Program's orientation provides this training to

prepare ALTs before they set off to their schools. Unfortunately, participants' evaluations of the orientation from a training standpoint were generally negative. Opinions ranged from the orientation being a good idea, but not very helpful (Mark, first interview, January 27, 2018) and primarily being tiring (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018) to the orientation being, "garbage," (Jon, first interview, January 29, 2018), "the worst idea and useless," (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018), and "the worst thing I've seen in my life," (Chris, first interview, February 9, 2018). McConnell (2000) also found that the information presented in the orientation wasn't compatible with the realities ALTs encountered in their classrooms. It's difficult to blame the JET Program considering the great truth to ESID, which makes it impossible to give information that will be applicable to all ALTs in all their diverse situations. Prefectures also offer their own orientations once ALTs arrive, so the burden of training is not exclusively on the Tokyo orientation. The important takeaway from the general orientation not being useful for all participants, however, is that there are not consistent expectations or roles for ALTs the orientation can draw upon. This inconsistency makes building their identity even more complicated for ALTs since they don't have a strong basis to work from when they arrive at their schools. This begs the question: if ALTs don't receive educational training and information about their purpose and identities in schools at the Tokyo orientation, where do they turn for support?

### *JET Community for Training*

In a similar vein to predecessors' materials, as mentioned earlier, many participants mentioned turning to the JET community to fill in the gaps left by lack of training. Jon mentioned that he, "wouldn't know much of anything if there weren't other JETs in his area," because he turned to them for help when he needed direction (Jon, first interview, January 29,

2018). Samantha also mentioned that she relied on other ALTs first when she had questions, and referred to the JET Program as, “a lot of people using other people’s knowledge,” which showed how this practice is commonplace (Samantha, second interview, February 16, 2018). Because they are in the same position and understand the role of ALTs in specific prefectures and schools better than officials may due to direct experience, ALTs can be both a knowledgeable and convenient resource. Predecessors and other senior ALTs in the area have more familiarity with ALTs’ specific situations and struggles, allowing them to share their experiences and give guidance. Jacob briefly went into the usefulness of ALTs’ specific knowledge base when discussing upcoming school changes. While he doesn’t know who will be moving or where they’ll be going yet, Jacob plans to ask his fellow ALTs about their experiences with any new JTEs he’ll be working with during the next school year, so he’ll have an idea of the role he’ll be playing in their classes (Jacob, second interview, February 16, 2018). This exchange of information is important, as it helps ALTs acclimate to their new situations. At the same time, however, it is crucial to recognize the underlying power of these exchanges. The information other ALTs share and the stories they tell can shape how ALTs interact with their environments and how they understand their roles. Therefore, conversations with other members of the ALT community can also be factors in ALTs’ negotiation of identity.

In addition to exchanging knowledge on an individual level, Jon and Sarah also mentioned the biannual ALT skill development conferences held in each prefecture. The structure of the conferences can vary from prefecture to prefecture, but all conferences feature presentations by current ALTs related to teaching. In other words, skill development conferences serve as a place for ALTs to develop their teaching methodology and teacher identity by hearing ideas from across the prefecture. Jon found these conferences to be very helpful when it came to

lesson planning (Jon, first interview, January 29, 2018). Samantha, however, shared doubts about the overall usefulness of ALTs' presentations because the level of experience and training and level of effort put into creating the presentations themselves varies from ALT to ALT (Samantha, second interview, February 16, 2018). Therefore, skill development conferences are not always beneficial in developing ALTs' teaching skills and practices. In some ways, ALTs' development at these conferences is limited by the skill levels of those around them. These conferences also present different identities for ALTs to navigate as they learn from each other. As ALTs are presented with the roles and actions of other ALTs in their prefecture, they can choose to model their choices and roles in the classroom to match what they have seen, to borrow only certain aspects, or reject these new ideas completely. Hence, in addition to providing training, ALTs' experiences at skill development conferences also play a role in ALT identity negotiation.

Finally, ALTs don't need to only rely on the knowledge of ALTs in their prefectures. Online resources developed and maintained by JETs also exist, allowing ALTs to share ideas and information with other ALTs throughout the country. One of the largest and most well-known data bases for ALTs is Englipedia. Englipedia is essentially an online encyclopedia of lesson plans submitted by JETs and organized by grade level and textbook (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018; Samantha, second interview, February 16, 2018). It serves a similar function to lesson plans and textbooks left behind by predecessors for new ALTs, but on a much larger scale, and can contribute to ALTs identity formation in a similar way. By giving examples of classroom practices and roles played by different ALTs, users of Englipedia are introduced to aspects of other ALTs' identities and must reconcile these with their own identity by either adopting similar exercises and roles, adapting what they've found to fit their current identity, or

rejecting these alternate roles and practices. In addition to Englipedia, there are also various Facebook groups related to the JET Program, such as regional groups, special interest groups, etc., ALTs can also turn to for ideas or to ask questions. Amanda mentioned that she occasionally posted in the Facebook group for her region asking for ideas for lesson plans (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). Facebook groups further connect JET Program ALTs on the national level and foster exchange of ideas and information that can contribute to ALTs' navigation of identity.

#### 4.3 The Reality of the JET Program

Following the discussion of the many ascribed identities ALTs must navigate and the factors that affect their navigation, it is necessary to consider the reality of the JET Program. The roles ALTs take on and the expectations they set for themselves inform their choices and actions, creating the reality of the JET Program. It is important to remember that ESID is just as relevant when describing the reality of the JET Program as it was in ALTs' negotiation of identity. As ALTs are in different prefectures, teaching at different schools, working with different JTEs, and living in different conditions, there is not a singular experience that can be labelled as reality for everyone. As with the discussion of identity, however, there are common themes to be found across multiple and sometimes even all participants' stories. This section will explore these themes.

##### 4.3.1 Ostensible vs. Real Purpose of the JET Program

Between the JET Program website, application questions, the interview process, and trainings, it is safe to assume that all ALTs have heard and are familiar with the official purpose of the JET Program. When questioned about the purpose of the JET Program, however, many participants pointed out that the official purpose and what is actually happening in the JET

Program are not always the same. Based on their experiences, participants determined what they saw as the purpose of the JET Program in practice. This understanding can both be influenced by and influence ALTs' identities.

Jacob shared that he sees the ostensible purpose of the JET Program as teaching English, but has doubts about the actual effectiveness of having ALTs as teachers (Jacob, second interview, February 16, 2018). Despite there being ALTs in his city consistently for the past 25 years, he has encountered many people who are of the age that they should have been taught by ALTs, but still don't have command of conversational English (Jacob, second interview, February 16, 2018). There are many factors in EFL contexts ranging from lack of opportunities to use English to differing motivations for learning English that could lead to greater or lesser acquisition of conversational English for students (Brown 2014). Jacob, however, interpreted the lack of conversational English ability in his city as the JET Program not achieving its purported purpose, causing him to reevaluate the value of the JET Program. Rather than holistically denying that the JET Program serves a purpose due to its perceived failings in the education sector, Jacob focuses instead on other ways the JET Program can be beneficial to students. His conclusion is that for the students of ALTs the, "main thing is to have positive experiences with foreigners, so they're not scared of English," (Jacob, second interview, February 16, 2018). Defining the purpose of the JET Program in this way brings it in line with his roles in the classroom and shows the reality of his experiences as an ALT. Many participants came to similar conclusions based on their experiences.

Rachel actively noted the disparity between the ostensible and real purpose of the JET Program, saying, "there's the purpose [of the JET Program], and there's what it actually does...It's two different things," (Rachel, second interview, March 3, 2018). She sees the official



purpose of the JET Program as teaching English to students, teaching JTEs proper pronunciation, and acting as a cultural ambassador to the school and local community (Rachel, second interview, March 3, 2018). This purpose doesn't correlate directly with her experiences, however. When it comes to her role in the classroom, Rachel feels her role is to be a clown in front of the class and excite the students rather than teach English (Rachel, second interview, March 3, 2018). This reality is similar to Jacob's in the fact that both downplay the importance of teaching English. As a cultural ambassador, Rachel finds that cross-cultural exchange and actively engaging with the community comes easily for some ALTs, but is more challenging for others, herself included (Rachel, second interview, March 3, 2018). As a result, Rachel has reconsidered the nature of being a cultural ambassador through the JET Program as well. In the end, she defines cultural exchange more broadly, recognizing passive modes of cultural exchange in addition to active modes, saying, "maybe you're the first foreigner in the area, and that's enough," (Rachel, second interview, March 3, 2018). While this definition differs from Jacob's in scope, as his focused on ALTs' roles in the classroom and Rachel's focused on their roles in the community, both center their definitions on simply being a foreigner and interacting with those around you in positive ways.

Samantha also recognized that while the official purpose of the JET Program includes both English education and cultural exchange, in reality, ALTs play a larger role as cultural ambassadors than as English teachers (Samantha, second interview, February 16, 2018). The reason behind cultural exchange taking priority is twofold. For one, Samantha noted, "They [students] would have an educator whether or not I'm here," (Samantha, second interview, February 16, 2018). While ALTs may contribute specific skills such as native pronunciation to the classes they teach, JTEs are also qualified and capable, so the presence of ALTs as teachers

is not essential. To say they are essential would be to play into the native speaker fallacy and discredit the skills and qualifications JTEs bring to the classroom (Kubota, 2009). On the other hand, ALTs serve a specific and unique purpose as cultural ambassadors that can share personal experiences (Mahoney, 2004). Samantha stated that by being present in classrooms and in the community, ALTs are able to increase Japanese people's awareness of diverse peoples and able to communicate with foreigners (Samantha, second interview, February 16, 2018). As a consequence of ALTs' ability to become living examples of the world outside of Japan in a way that JTEs cannot, in reality, the role of ALTs as cultural ambassadors takes on more importance than their role as English teachers.

Jon agreed that the JET Program is, "less about teaching English and more about sharing your culture and cultural awareness," (Jon, second interview, February 26, 2018). Jon also felt that he specifically contributed significantly to increasing cultural awareness by not fitting Japan's traditional image of a foreigner. He was able to raise awareness to the diversity of the US and offer a different perspective on American culture by being black (Jon, second interview, February 26, 2018). This perspective and awareness are invaluable, as personal interactions with ALTs who don't fit the stereotypes of foreigners are the best way to eliminate these stereotypes. In addition to the roles of teaching English and sharing culture, Jon also saw a third role held by ALTs that's not mentioned in the JET Program's official purpose. Because Japan is a largely homogenous country, Jon felt that he and other ALTs were serving the purpose of making Japan more diverse (Jon, second interview, February 26, 2018). While this is similar to the purpose of raising awareness of diversity in the US, it is distinct as it goes beyond altering students' and community members' ideas of the world outside of Japan. It also serves as a way for the people Jon interacted with to reflect on common practices in Japan. Specifically, Jon saw himself

helping teachers become sensitive to discrimination at the workplace they had never noticed before through his presence (Jon, second interview, February 26, 2018). This is a unique purpose ALTs are in a position to serve in reality that is never mentioned in statements related to the official purpose of the JET Program.

Chris also feels more weight is placed on the role of cultural ambassador in comparison to that of teacher, saying, “I can tell you the spiel they say: cultural exchange and teaching, but to me, if I look at it from my point of view, it’s a way for different cultures and communities to come to an understanding of each other,” (Chris, second interview, February 24, 2018). This is interesting considering he plays such an active role in the classroom, creating the curriculum and lessons plans, but still feels fostering intercultural understanding is the primary purpose of his position. Ultimately, whether they’re teaching classes, interacting with teachers and students informally, or going out into the community, ALTs are constantly fostering and developing intercultural communication skills and understanding because of their status as foreigners. This is a powerful and inescapable role ALTs fulfill. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, Chris has also run into strong stereotypes in Japan. Hence, similar to Jon, he sees himself as, “a portal for [Japanese people] to see a different world to theirs,” (Chris, second interview, February 24, 2018). Interacting with others, gives Chris the chance to change people’s images of both Great Britain and black people. Therefore, combatting stereotypes and introducing Japanese people to diverse narratives is another purpose of the JET Program.

Mark also emphasized his role of introducing diversity and giving students a new view of the world (Mark, second interview, February 24, 2018). Mark further mentioned the role of ALTs in diplomacy. While the duties ALTs perform are a far cry from those of a diplomat, in every interaction they do work to foster positive international relationships. It’s easy to carry

negative thoughts and stereotypes about people with whom you've never interacted. This becomes harder after positive interactions, however. Therefore, ALTs can be seen as local diplomats that maintain positive relations between countries through individual interactions.

While even the name of the JET Program, Japan Exchange Teaching Program, emphasizes the teaching aspect of ALTs' lives, their greatest achievements in Japan often lie in other aspects of their positions. Similar to the participants of this study, ALTs in Galloway (2009)'s study also felt they were more useful in the roles of fostering mutual understanding and sharing culture than in roles directly related to English language education. ALTs are effective as cultural ambassadors, living examples of their countries, and local diplomats. Every situation is different and the exact nature of each ALTs' purpose may be different, but it is important to recognize that reality of the JET Program doesn't always match its ostensible purpose. Furthermore, while the identities ALTs take on may impact how they view the purpose of the JET Program, their view of the purpose of the JET Program also certainly impacts how they build their identities as ALTs. As a result, it is crucial that we consider the difference between official purpose and lived purpose for ALTs.

#### 4.3.2 Those who Seek Will Find Work

As mentioned previously, there are no set guidelines for ALT duties, and responsibilities can vary greatly from ALT to ALT. While ALTs' duties can be different due to the expectations of the schools they work at or the JTEs they work with, in many cases ALTs themselves play a large role in determining the work they do. Many participants mentioned that they are given as much work as they seek out. Therefore, ALTs have some ability to shape the reality of their JET Program experience.

As mentioned previously, Samantha's schools and JTEs generally have low expectations for her. As a result, most of her responsibilities and duties that are beyond the basic duties of ALTs are the result of her actively taking on responsibility (Samantha, second interview, February 16, 2018). In this situation, Samantha has considerable control over her reality. She can choose to either maintain her current level of work or increase it by volunteering to do more. Many participants shared similar experiences, which will be expanded upon, implying that being able to influence the amount of work they do may be a common power for ALTs. At the same time, Samantha recognizes one of the major limitations on her ability to take on extra work. She stated, "I could be doing more, but I'm not sure where," (Samantha, second interview, February 16, 2018). While ALTs who seek responsibility will generally find responsibility, due to factors such as lack of experience and lack of training, they may not always know where to look for additional duties. This is an important factor to consider when observing how ALTs' ability to take on work plays out in schools.

Jon agreed that the amount of work he did depended on how much he was willing to do for the school (Jon, first interview, January 29, 2018). In his experience, JTEs thought some ALTs weren't serious about their work, so they were hesitant to give ALTs responsibilities beyond their basic duties (Jon, first interview, January 29, 2018). As a result, ALTs were given work when they asked for it because the act of asking for work showed the seriousness of ALTs. This echoes Samantha's experiences with JTEs having low initial expectations for ALTs, but allowing ALTs to take on additional responsibility on their own. Jon mentioned that putting in extra effort improved his relationships with his JTEs (Jon, first interview, January 29, 2018). This means that in addition to preventing boredom or increasing feelings of involvement in their

schools, ALTs may be motivated to take on extra responsibility to show their investment to their JTEs. This allows ALTs to manipulate a different aspect of their realities.

Jacob noted that while many JETs complain of being bored due to lack of responsibility, he always manages to find work to do (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018). He finds ways to get involved with his schools beyond the duties he was given initially. He stands outside to greet students in the morning, goes around to different classes during recess, grades students' English homework, creates an English board, and spends his remaining downtime studying kanji (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018). At the time of his interview, he was also planning on using his free time at work to get a TEFL certificate, since it would be considered job training and be reimbursed by the JET Program (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018). While Jacob has been quite successful in finding spaces where he can increase his involvement in school, he has also encountered factors that limited his ability to be involved. Originally, Jacob planned on helping with clubs at his schools, but his school doesn't have any clubs he is interested in, and creating an English club involves too much red tape (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018). Opportunities at schools don't always match ALTs expectations, and the complexity of processes to create the opportunities they seek may prevent ALTs from creating spaces for certain types of engagement. Jacob is also prevented from joining school clubs for another reason. Club activities occur after his contract hours end, so being involved with clubs would extend his work day considerably without him being paid for being at school beyond his contract hours (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018). One reason ALTs are given fewer responsibilities is because their contracts do not include overtime pay. Therefore, schools can be hesitant to give ALTs certain opportunities, and ALTs may also prefer not to take on responsibilities that extend their work

beyond their contract. ALTs can always choose to stay beyond their hours, of course, but taking on responsibilities beyond the school day must come from their own initiative.

Rachel shared that in her experience assuming extra responsibility does not only increase JTEs' belief in her ability and commitment, but also leads to changes in expectations. What at first is seen as exceeding expectations becomes the basics expected of her. This phenomenon can be summed up in Rachel's quote, "I assumed responsibility, and I was given it," (Rachel, second interview, March 7, 2018). Duties she has assumed range from classroom duties to office duties and became expectations overtime. Once she began creating lesson plans on her own, they were completely entrusted to her (Rachel, first interview, February 6, 2018). While at first, other teachers offered to wash her mugs and put them away, once she began washing her own mug in the office, that became an expectation as well (Rachel, second interview, March 7, 2018). In this way, she has been able to affect her schools' expectations for her role as an ALT. While this can be empowering for ALTs, Rachel also noted that it can be dangerous if you take on responsibilities too easily. After a year and a half of experience, she has stopped, "grasping at anything [she could] be responsible for," and started carefully considering if ideas are feasible or not and the amount of work they will involve before agreeing to new duties (Rachel, second interview, March 7, 2018). While taking on additional responsibilities can be tempting because it prevents ALTs from feeling that they're acting as chair warmers and can improve relationships between ALTs and their schools, it can also be dangerous for ALTs causing their coworkers to assign them roles they are not prepared for or willing to constantly perform.

Chris also mentioned trying to take on more responsibility because he doesn't like being bored (Chris, second interview, February 24, 2018). He first turned to common avenues for school involvement: actively going around to talk to students during break times, creating his

own curriculum and lesson plans, and unofficially leading his base school's English club (Chris, second interview, February 24, 2018). Chris also goes beyond conventional ways of involvement by seeking ways to create additional avenues of support for his students. During his second year with the JET Program, Chris has started to set up an exchange program with a US high school for his students because he thinks it will be helpful for their English development (Chris, second interview, February 24, 2018). ALTs can be creative in the responsibilities they take on. They can even create responsibilities that didn't exist before. The ability to not just assume preexisting duties, but to create new duties clearly shows the power of ALTs to shape their reality.

Generally, ALTs are given work when they seek it out. In addition to giving ALTs the opportunity to contribute to their perceived roles, by choosing to seek additional responsibilities or to fulfill only the roles asked of them, ALTs play a major role in shaping the reality of the JET Program. It is essential to recognize that factors such as time, interest, understanding of ALTs' roles, situational features, etc. can limit the level of changes and the nature of changes ALTs are able to instigate. However, as they navigate their unique situations and unique personalities, ALTs directly contribute to the reality of the JET Program and how its purpose are or are not realized.

#### 4.3.3 Sharing and Participating in Culture

ALTs are brought to Japan to be both teachers and cultural ambassadors. Hence, it is important to consider not only the reality of the JET Program and ALTs' roles in the classroom, but also the reality of ALTs' community involvement. As the JET Program is meant to foster cultural exchange, we also must consider both how ALTs share their own cultures and how they expose themselves to and participate in Japanese culture.

##### *Sharing Culture through Structured Community Involvement*



As the JET Program expects ALTs to share their cultures with both their students and the community, it is only natural that it would provide avenues through which ALTs can achieve this. Structured community involvement mentioned by participants ranged from extracurricular activities that allowed ALTs to connect with students in smaller groups outside of class to running cultural workshops for community members. The diversity of structured activities gave ALTs the opportunity to share their cultures with diverse groups and participate in the JET Program's goal of grassroots internationalization. In addition to structured activities organized by the JET Program, participants also mentioned school and community events that allowed them to connect with individuals and share cultures.

Mark is involved with a group of ALTs that hosted cooking classes for the community in which each ALT teaches others how to make a dish from their home country (Mark, second interview, February 24, 2018). In addition to showing the community the diversity of ALTs in the area, it also served as a low-stress arena for cultural exchange. Having events as a group disperses the burden of planning and is less intimidating since ALTs are supported by those around them. Mark also mentioned that local festivals are another good way to connect with the community (Mark, second interview, February 24, 2018). Structured community festivals are also low-pressure to join and make it easy to connect with the community since connecting the community is one of the purposes of festivals. Mark also interacts with the community by teaching community English classes (Mark, second interview, February 24, 2018). Classes give ALTs and community members purpose in their interactions, leading to less anxiety and uncertainty than unstructured interactions.

Amanda took advantage of various programs and organizations to connect with her students outside of class. She worked at English camps, optional Saturday events where students

can meet ALTs and practice English (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). She was also highly involved in her prefecture's English Challenge, in which students competed to win trips to English speaking countries and spots at an English summer camp (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). Amanda could surely interact with students and share American culture in the classroom. These opportunities, however, allowed her to interact with students in smaller groups and as individuals, increasing her opportunities to share her culture. Amanda was also involved with her school's baking club (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). Interest in English is not a requirement to join baking clubs, so this involvement allowed Amanda to connect with students who she may not have had the opportunity to interact with through English-focused activities. Finally, Amanda created her own structured event by having students trick-or-treat at her house during Halloween (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). This allowed her to connect with both her students and their parents, while very intentionally sharing American culture. This event may have made it easier for her students' mothers to approach Amanda, as many came to her house to give her return gifts for the candy she gave their children (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). Amanda's story shows that structured extracurricular activities set up by the JET Program and the schools themselves can serve as a space for ALTs to interact with their students on more personal levels, providing more opportunities to share their cultures with students. ALTs are also able to create structured events of their own that can both share their culture and make it easier for the community to approach them.

Jacob's strongest personal tie to the community is through his homestay family. He was introduced to a local homestay program during his prefectural orientation and now considers his homestay family as his only real Japanese friends in the area (Jacob, second interview, February

16, 2018). The power of structured interactions can be found in this fact. While Jacob could make Japanese friends in other, unstructured contexts, he has been most successful through a program. Furthermore, one of the primary ways Jacob mentioned he connects with the community is through DIAD, an annual conference at a local junior college where ALTs participate in workshops put on by students and share their cultures (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018). This program is beneficial to all ALTs in his area, as it gives them a fixed platform from which to share their culture. Structured community interactions are not an automatic solution, however. Jacob attended a local English conversation time once after meeting its leader at a bus stop, but never went back to it because he preferred practicing his Japanese in his free time over speaking more English (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018). This conversation group would have given him the opportunity to share American culture with community members who were already interested in English. It did not coincide with Jacob's personal goals, however, making it an unattractive option as a way he could spend his time outside of work. As can be seen through these examples, structured interactions can lessen the burden of initiating cultural exchange by providing the opportunity for interactions. Although, structured opportunities may not be successful if they run counter to ALTs' personal goals.

### *Getting Involved in the Community*

While structured events and activities can facilitate ALT involvement with the community, they are by no means the only way for ALTs to interact with their communities. Many ALTs seek out opportunities on their own to get involved with Japanese culture or meet members of the community. At the same time, some ALTs feel pressure to act as cultural ambassadors, but question their success in fulfilling this role. As always, every situation is different, but this mantra perhaps rings most true in this arena.

To begin, some ALTs feel that they have not been successful in engaging with the community. Samantha shared that while she had felt she should get involved with the community early on, at some point community involvement, “stopped being a priority,” so she isn’t very involved with her local community now (Samantha, first interview, January 26, 2018). Initially, she tried going to an English conversation group to connect with the community, but quit when she realized she was only participating because she felt she should, not because of actual interest (Samantha, first interview, January 26, 2018). While expectations for ALTs to interact with their community can provide the push they need to look for opportunities, it can also be counterproductive for some ALTs, as their interactions feel less authentic. Such feelings can be highly discouraging and cause ALTs to step back from community involvement. At the same time, while Samantha doesn’t feel that she is particularly active in the community, she still feels that she is participating in cultural exchange simply by living in the community. She stated, “I see that all as cross cultural exchange. Just being out in public and whatever I do out there is also very much how other people are forming their opinions on people outside of Japan,” (Samantha, first interview, January 26, 2018). In other words, even if ALTs aren’t involved with specific community groups or have close Japanese friends, they can still act as representatives in their daily actions and help foster understanding of their cultures in that way.

Mark also doesn’t feel particularly connected with his local community, but does feel connected to the greater community of Japan as a country. He shared, “I don’t really feel like part of my town community, but I do feel like I’ve joined both the JET community and the Japanese community at large. I’ve engaged with enough people here that I feel like I’m part of the country, but not necessarily part of my town, but I do live in the middle of nowhere,” (Mark, first interview, January 27, 2018). While Mark hasn’t connected deeply with his local

community, he has been able to connect with Japanese people in general through travelling for his hobbies. After joining the JET Program, Mark discovered he loves climbing mountains and bought a walking stick from Mt Fuji that he takes around the country on all his mountain climbing ventures (Mark, first interview, January 27, 2018). Because the walking stick has brands from all the stops on Mt Fuji, it is easily recognizable, and Japanese people who see it often stop him to share their stories from climbing Mt Fuji (Mark, first interview, January 27, 2018). Through this, he is able to connect with people throughout the country. He noted that he thinks the reason he is more successful connecting in this way than with his local community is because his walking stick serves as a conversation starter when he is climbing mountains, but he doesn't have a similar conversation starter when he is just around his town (Mark, first interview, January 27, 2018). Getting involved with the community can be challenging, but similarly with structured events, certain items can facilitate conversations by giving them specific purpose. This particular method may have different effectiveness in different areas, however.

Other ALTs have been more active in seeking out ways to get involved in their local communities. While Rachel feels pressure to engage with her community and share American culture, she finds that it is easier for her to join in Japanese culture than share her own culture (Rachel, first interview, February 6, 2018). She is involved in her city's festivals and played flute for the fall festival (Rachel, first interview, February 6, 2018). While participating in festivals helps her connect with Japanese people and potentially created the opportunity for conversations about American culture, Rachel still sees her involvement more as her interacting with Japanese culture than sharing her culture. Rachel is also a regular at a local bar, which allows her to connect with other regulars (Rachel, first interview, February 6, 2018). While she didn't describe this as community involvement at first, her opinion shifted when she thought about it more.

While ALTs may have extravagant visions as to what it means to be involved in their communities, Rachel recognized that there are also “small, micro-things,” they can do to connect (Rachel, first interview, February 6, 2018). Rachel is able to connect with the other regulars at the bar and listen to their stories. Even if she is just listening to a woman talk about how her marriage isn’t going well, Rachel recognized this as a way to connect with individuals in the community and give them the opportunity to learn about Americans through direct encounters (Rachel, first interview, February 6, 2018). This is reminiscent of Samantha’s comment that simply living in her community can be an act of cultural exchange. Interactions with the community don’t need to be large-scale or formal to be meaningful.

Because she was with the JET Program for six years, Amanda was able to connect with her community in many different ways. She participated in calligraphy classes every Tuesday, became a sumo wrestler, competing in competitions throughout Japan, and volunteered at her local shrine (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). While these are all certainly ways to get involved with the community, they are primarily examples of engaging with Japanese culture, supporting the position that it’s easier to participate in Japanese culture than sharing one’s own culture for some ALTs. However, through these activities, Amanda was able to foster deep connections with members of her community. She became familiar with a couple she referred to as her “Japanese grandparents,” and often visited them for food and conversation (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). While visiting a Japanese home may also be considered experiencing Japanese culture, through this relationship Amanda and her Japanese grandparents were able to experience meaningful cultural exchange. This is another example of the “small, micro-things” Rachel mentioned.

Jon engaged with his community in two unique ways. Due to his interest in craft beer, he started volunteering at a local craft beer bar (Jon, first interview, January 29, 2018). While the JET Program doesn't allow ALTs to take on outside work as part of their contract, he was able to make a deal with the bar owner where he could volunteer and receive free beer (Jon, first interview, January 29, 2018). Jon's interest in beer and high level of Japanese allowed him to find a unique and personal way to connect with his community. As a result, he was able to both explore one of his interests and learn the vocabulary he needed to discuss his interest in Japanese, while also building personal bonds with members of the community. Jon also started rapping while he was with the JET Program and performed at different venues across the country (Jon, first interview, January 29, 2018). This was another creative way to combine personal development of new interests and skills, sharing culture, and connecting with others. Jon recognized the uniqueness of his experiences among ALTs and attributed it to his willingness to go far beyond his comfort zone and Japanese language ability (Jon, first interview, January 29, 2018). For ALTs who are less outgoing or have lower Japanese abilities, it can be challenging to engage with the community beyond the structured events and organizations provided by the JET Program, schools, and the community.

Finally, Chris has been able to engage with his community in various ways despite his lack of experience with Japanese. Initially Chris reached out to a local *kyudo*, Japanese archery, group and attended practices for a while, but eventually had to stop because of scheduling difficulties (Chris, first interview, February 9, 2018). Despite not having mastered Japanese at the time, he used what he did know how to say to express his desire to learn *kyudo* and was allowed to join (Chris, first interview, February 9, 2018). While Jon's experiences are a good example of ALTs using the Japanese skill they cultivated before beginning the JET Program to

seek out opportunities, Chris's story shows that linguistic limitations don't have to stand in the way of seeking community involvement. After *kyudo*, Chris continued to actively seek out ways to connect with his community and started doing *kendo* and playing basketball with his students and people in his area (Chris, first interview, February 9, 2018). Chris also recognized that not all ALTs have been able to connect with the community in the ways that he has either because they don't know where to look for opportunities or feel embarrassed speaking to community members with their broken Japanese (Chris, first interview, February 9, 2018). He thinks the JET Program could help reduce these barriers to involvement by providing more support for ALTs engaging with the community whether that be through having established opportunities ALTs can take advantage of or helping ALTs find opportunities based on their interests (Chris, second interview, February 24, 2018).

ALTs get involved with their communities in a variety of ways ranging from simply living in the community to joining different cultural groups to finding ways to pursue their hobbies in Japan. While it's easy to imagine ALTs sharing their culture on a large scale, small-scale interactions and individual exchanges of culture are common. Additionally, engaging with the community can be more challenging than it first seems for ALTs because of language barriers, inability to find ways to engage, etc. As a result, type of engagement and level of engagement do not look the same for everyone. Still, simply by living in Japan, ALTs are all participating in a base level of culture exchange every day.

#### 4.4 Home Again: The Struggle Continues

While only two participants in this study were alumni of the JET Program, they both shared similar experiences related to identity negotiation and their return to the United States, which are worthy of noting here. Both Amanda and Jon studied abroad in Japan for one year



during their time in university, so this was not their first time returning to the US after extensive time in Japan. Still, both struggled upon their return home. Jon said that coming back to the US was, “the hardest part,” of the JET program. He explained the difficulty of connecting with those around him when he was first back. He stated, “All I wanted to talk about was Japan because it was my life,” (Jon, second interview, February 26, 2018). For JET Program participants, everything they do is tied to their identity as an ALT because they’re either teaching or exchanging culture, whether that means sharing their own culture or learning about Japanese culture by interacting with it, or both. All of these experiences challenge and shape their identity. However, these experiences don’t only shape ALT’s identities as ALTs, but as people as well. Interacting with a different culture daily and constantly having to face your identity as a foreigner can cause your identity to change drastically while abroad. Jon said that because of his experiences on the JET Program, he now, “sees things so differently,” (Jon, second interview, February 26, 2018). This new perspective can make it extremely difficult to connect with people who haven’t had similar experiences. One of the greatest challenges Jon faced upon his return to the US was how to relate with people (Jon, second interview, February 26, 2018). The challenges presented by altered identity are compounded by the fact he missed two years of American culture. He mentioned, “I don’t know what people talk about now,” which makes it that much more difficult to connect and integrate (Jon, second interview, February 26, 2018). Coming back into his home culture after missing a few years prevented Jon from easily slipping back into his old identity in the US where he could start conversations with others easily. As a result, he had to undergo further identity negotiation to his old identity at home and the identity he developed while in Japan. Amanda’s experiences show that this is not a unique struggle.

Amanda agreed that coming back to the US after six years was the hardest part of the JET Program experience (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). To begin, the length of Amanda's participation in the JET Program presented challenges when she returned home. When she arrived back in the US, she had been gone so long that all her friends had left the area (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). While distance is not as significant of a hindrance in keeping in touch with friends due to internet communications, Amanda faced challenges even with the friends she could contact and meet. She wanted to talk about Japan all the time because it was her life for years, but her friends couldn't relate to her experiences, making it difficult to reconnect (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). As a result, currently, all of Amanda's closest friends are JETs and former JETs because they can relate to each other's experiences and understand the challenges of being back home (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). This experience strongly correlates to Jon's struggles with talking to people now because he sees the world so differently. Amanda's struggles coming back were not limited to connecting with those around her, however. Amanda also experienced challenges related to her identity upon her return. She stated that through working as an ALT, "something intrinsic about you changes," (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). She negotiated an identity during her time with the JET Program that was very different from her identity at home before she left. When talking about her situation now, she said, "I don't know who I am anymore," (Amanda, first interview, February 17, 2018). Returning home caused Amanda to face her old identity that was created to suit her environment in the US. At the same time, however, her experiences in Japan altered her in such a way that she couldn't simply slip back into this old identity. Instead, she had to once again negotiate her identity, this time between her identity in the US and the identity she negotiated while working as an ALT.

In summary, working as an ALT through the JET Program is not an isolated experience. Alumni ALTs' experiences in Japan and the identities they negotiated during their time with the JET Program continue to affect them on their return to the US. This is a common experience for returnees of long-term international experiences, who find upon returning home that both they and their home communities changed while they were abroad (Dettweiler, 2015; Gaw, 2000; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Young, 2014). As a result, returnees experience cultural dissonance, just as Jon and Amanda described, as part of their reverse culture shock process (Gaw, 2000; Kagitcibasi, 1987; Young, 2014). Returnees do not usually expect reverse culture shock (Gaw, 2000; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Young, 2014). Because this challenge is largely unforeseen, it can be particularly formidable for ALTs.

#### 4.5 Perceived Challenges of ALTs

Five major themes regarding their perceived challenges in the JET Program emerged from the unique stories of the five participants in this study. These themes will be discussed in detail in this section. The major themes were as follows:

1. Expectations for ALTs are inconsistent.
2. The JET Program's official purpose doesn't translate precisely to reality.
3. ALTs collaborate to meet needs not met by the JET Program in official capacities.
4. Community involvement is possible, but does not always occur in practice.
5. JET alumni encounter challenges connecting with others and understanding themselves when they return home.

1. Expectations for ALTs are inconsistent.

Comparing participants' roles in the classroom, it is clear to see that there are not consistent expectations applied by schools and JTEs to all ALTs in the JET Program.

Participants' duties ranged from Chris building his own curriculum and teaching his lessons as the lead teacher to Rachel being used as a human tape recorder in her middle school classes with many participants existing somewhere between these two extremes. While it's possible that some of these differences can be attributed to ALTs teaching different grades, inconsistency can still be found when comparing ALTs at the same grade levels. At the elementary school, for example, Samantha, Amanda, and Jon created their own lessons and curricula and were treated as head teachers, with JTEs occasionally helping by offering translations. For Rachel, however, her elementary classes were a combination of her acting as the head teacher and team-teaching with her JTEs. Certainly, the disparity between ALT duties from school to school even when grade level is held constant makes it challenging for ALTs to know what to expect at first. The possible confusion is even greater when considering that inconsistencies do not only exist between ALTs. They also exist within every ALTs' individual story.

While Jon, Samantha, Amanda, and Rachel had considerable responsibility in elementary school and played a major role in lesson planning, they were more often treated as assistants or tape recorders in their middle schools. Because almost all ALTs who teach at middle schools also teach at elementary schools, inconsistencies between expectations at elementary schools and middle schools can present challenges when it comes to understanding what the role of an ALTs. Furthermore, many participants mentioned that even within a single school their roles vary depending on the JTE they are working with. Mark works with some teachers who want him in the room as an assistant while others prefer for him to run the class on his own. Jacob works with some teachers who see his ability to use Japanese with students as an asset and others who ban him from speaking in Japanese during class. Moreover, even if ALTs have come to understand their roles, they sometimes change over time. Rachel didn't make full lesson plans initially, but

started making her own lesson plans during her second year with the JET Program. Hence, ALTs can experience inconsistency of expectations in many ways, often all at once.

Inconsistent and variable expectations seem to be a norm for the JET Program. There are many possible reasons for this ranging from JTEs' teaching styles to BoE's expectations to ALTs' comfort with taking on responsibility, etc. In the case of JTEs and team-teaching, another possibility is lack of training in team-teaching methodology. While many factors contribute to the inconsistency of expectations applied to ALTs, increased training for both JTEs and ALTs in team-teaching may be beneficial. Navigating inconsistent expectations can be difficult and frustrating for ALTs, so any attempt to reduce inconsistency would surely be appreciated.

## 2. The JET Program's official purpose doesn't translate precisely to reality.

While all participants were aware of the official purpose of the JET Program, they all mentioned that what it actually achieved was slightly different. While the purpose of the JET Program mentions both teaching English and working as cultural ambassadors, many participants felt the educational component was not as emphasized in practice. Jacob and Samantha doubt that they are actually helping students improve their English through their presence in the classroom. Rather, they feel that they were brought into the classroom for the purpose of cultural exchange by giving students first-hand experiences with foreigners. Rachel also feels that her purpose lies outside of English education and is more to energize students during English classes. Jon, Chris, and Mark also emphasized their role in the classroom in giving students a new view of the world outside of Japan. Overall, participants' role in the classroom as cultural ambassadors is greater than the official purpose of the JET Program initially led them to believe.

As for their role as cultural ambassadors to the community, while many participants actively sought out ways to connect with their communities, the JET Program provided no

framework or support for longstanding engagement with community organizations, etc. For this reason, ALTs didn't have to get involved with the community in any particular or uniform way. As a result, some feel that what they bring to the community is diversity. Simply by existing in the community, they are giving community members a new view of foreigners and potentially challenging stereotypes held by the community. While this is certainly being a cultural ambassador in some capacity, it is not the role many participants imagined when they first heard that ALTs should participate in cultural exchange. Hence, it can also be considered a deviation from the ostensible purpose of the JET Program.

The disparity between the official purpose of the JET Program and how ALTs view the real purpose of the JET Program is interesting for several reasons. For one, similar to the case of inconsistent expectations, this difference can make it difficult for ALTs to predict or understand their role at first since they have been primed with a purpose that does not exactly match their reality. Secondly, it's interesting to consider the possible reasons behind this disparity. The disparity may exist because ALTs regularly interpret their purpose in their schools and communities differently than JET Program officials who are not privy to the complete reality of the JET Program. This would relate to MEXT's goal of gaining a better understanding of the roles and lives of ALTs (MEXT, 2011). It is also possible that the JET Program recruits ALTs for reasons others than those they officially publish. This would correspond with McConnell (2000)'s assertion that the official purpose of the JET Program is often subverted to suit local institutions and priorities. If the first possibility is true, the JET Program needs to become aware of the reality of ALTs' experiences and address this gap. If the second possibility is true, it would be more productive for the JET Program to honestly advertise their goals in recruiting NESTs, so ALTs can have a clear understanding of their role as JET Program participants.

### 3. ALTs collaborate to meet needs not met by the JET Program in official capacities.

The general opinion among participants was that the JET Program orientation left much to be desired. While Rachel and Jacob noted the orientation was useful for connecting with other JETs, everyone felt it was less helpful when it came to preparing them to teach. Amanda specifically mentioned that since most ALTs come with minimal to no official teacher education, training on lesson planning and classroom management would have been helpful. This appeared to be a common sentiment among participants. In order to fill in this training gap, all participants mentioned being able to turn to the JET community.

While their actual usefulness depended on the person, all participants had predecessors that left materials, such as lesson plans and textbooks they could work from. While participants didn't usually directly adopt these lesson plans, Jacob and Samantha noted their usefulness as a base to work from. Because this is a long-standing problem, ALTs have also setup online resources, such as Englipedia, to provide other ALTs with lesson ideas. Amanda also mentioned the usefulness of Facebook groups to ask what activities other ALTs in the area are using or for advice on lesson plans. In this way, the JET community rises up to fill in training and knowledge gaps. At the same time, some participants question the usefulness of this method because the JETs they're learning from have just as little training as they do.

### 4. Community involvement is possible, but does not always occur in practice.

Participants found various ways to engage with their communities, showing that its possible for ALTs to connect locally. Chris volunteered at a craft beer bar and rapped. Amanda participated in calligraphy, sumo, and her local shrine. Rachel played flute at her city's fall festival and volunteered at a local English conversation school. Chris participated in *kyudo* and *kendo*. At the same time, however, not all ALTs are as involved with their communities as

others. Samantha, Mark, and Jacob feel that they haven't been as successful connecting locally. Rachel also feels that, while she participates in the community in some ways, she isn't able to participate as actively as other ALTs in her area. Therefore, it's important to recognize that while involvement is possible, it does not always occur in reality.

There are various reasons for low community involvement among some ALTs, but one in particular stood out in this study's participants' stories. Rachel, Amanda, and Samantha all mentioned that they don't feel comfortable "putting themselves out there." Comparatively, Chris and Jon cited a willingness to put themselves out there as the reason they were successful in connecting with their communities in a variety of ways. It can be intimidating to approach community organizations on your own when doing so means going out of your comfort zone and confronting language and culture barriers. Inhibitions may be compounded when considering that working in Japanese schools and teaching English may also be placing ALTs outside of their comfort zone. How then can ALTs who are hesitant to seek opportunities to engage with the community on their own fulfill their role as cultural ambassadors to the community?

For some, they changed the definition of community involvement in their minds. Samantha decided that simply by living in her city and doing mundane activities such as grocery shopping, she is working as a cultural ambassador by influencing community member's ideas of foreigners through her visibility. Mark connects with the greater Japanese community more than his local community through hiking. Rachel focuses on individual interactions as opportunities for cultural exchange. Community engagement on a large scale is possible, but not achieved by all ALTs. Smaller degrees of involvement are more common to all ALTs. If deeper involvement is the goal, however, this may be possible through the JET Program supporting ALTs in finding



places they can be involved, as for some, initiating engagement is the most difficult step in the process.

5. JET alumni encounter challenges connecting with others and understanding themselves when they return home.

Finally, Amanda and Jon, the only two participants who were JET Program alumni, both shared challenges they faced returning to the US. The JET Program is a significant and life-changing experience, particularly for ALTs who stay for multiple years. Jon and Amanda's perspectives changed. Their identities changed. Even their knowledge of pop culture changed. These changes made it difficult for both to integrate back into American society.

After spending two years, in Jon's case, and six years, in Amanda's case, in Japan, all their conversations when they got home centered on their experiences in Japan. Japan and the JET Program was their life for years, so this is only natural. Unfortunately, this made it hard to connect with people who didn't have similar experiences. Missing years of their own culture also made it challenging to connect because they were suffering from reverse culture shock and didn't know what Americans talked about at the time. Beyond forging new connections, even reconnecting with friends proved challenging. Amanda felt her identity had completely changed while she was in Japan, so she didn't know where she fit in the US anymore. Both felt much more comfortable with others who had similar experiences, such as other JET Program alumni, both because they had something to connect over and because they understood the challenges of coming back home and not fitting into society in the exact way you did before.

While these experiences were only echoed by two participants, this is still a critical theme. Both mentioned these are common feelings among ex-ALTs, but weren't challenges they were prepared for. While ALTs know life will be different and challenging when going to Japan

because it's a different culture, they don't expect as many challenges coming back. While they can find support through the JET Program's alumni network, going home is still the hardest part of the JET Program.

#### 4.4 Summary of Chapter Four

This chapter findings of the study, including information on the identities ALTs must navigate while participating in the JET Program, the reality of ALTs participation, and the challenges ALTs face when returning to their home countries upon completion of the JET Program. The chapter closed with a discussion of the perceived challenges of ALTs.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the themes presented in Chapter Four. It also discusses the limitations of the study and provides suggestions for future research. Finally, it presents suggestions to the JET Program administration based on Chapter Four's analysis.

### 5.1 Summary of Findings

Five themes with regard to ALTs' perceived challenges emerged during this study:

1. Expectations for ALTs are inconsistent.
2. The JET Program's official purpose doesn't translate precisely to reality.
3. ALTs collaborate to meet needs not met by the JET Program in official capacities.
4. Community involvement is possible, but does not always occur in practice.
5. JET alumni encounter challenges connecting with others and understanding themselves when they return home.

In addition to inconsistency in expectations across participant's stories, individual ALTs experienced varying expectations depending on the grade level they were teaching, the school at which they were teaching, and the JTE with whom they were working. Expectations could also change over time. ALTs must navigate these inconsistencies, which can be challenging and frustrating. Furthermore, inconsistencies and changing expectations make it difficult for ALTs to understand their roles in their classrooms initially.

Additional inconsistency exists between the stated purpose of the JET Program and the reality of ALTs' experiences. The ostensible purpose of the JET Program emphasizes both English education and cultural exchange, but many ALTs felt that they played a bigger role in classes as cultural ambassadors than as teachers. They saw giving students new perspectives on the world outside of Japan as a more prominent classroom role than they anticipated it to be.

After arrival in Japan, many ALTs also felt that while engagement with their local community was encouraged, the lack of guidance or expectations for these interactions indicated that their actual purpose was simply to add diversity to the area and be passive cultural ambassadors.

Another theme was the importance of the JET community in filling training and information gaps not filled by official JET Program resources. Participants found the initial JET Program orientation in Tokyo lacking, particularly when it came to training for lesson planning and teaching. When looking for support in these areas, most participants turned to their local JET community or online resources created by other ALTs. While they could generally use these resources as a basis for their own lesson and activity designs, multiple participants expressed doubts about their usefulness since they were created by JETs who also lacked training.

Outside of the classroom, ALTs are expected to engage with their community. Participants showed different levels and types of involvement ranging from high involvement to minimal involvement. Those who were not as involved with their communities commonly cited feeling uncomfortable as the reason for their lack of engagement. Naturally outgoing and social participants were generally more successful at connecting with the community. Among participants with lower engagement levels, different definitions of community engagement emerged that emphasized ways they interacted with the community.

Finally, alumni ALTs shared that going back to the US was the hardest part of the JET Program due to reverse culture shock. After spending years in Japan, their experiences with the JET Program were their main topic of conversation. Additionally, alumni ALTs found it difficult to connect with people who didn't have similar experiences. The way alumni viewed the world changed in ways that others couldn't understand. Further, alumni ALTs also had to reconcile

their identity from before joining the JET Program with the identity they built during their time as ALTs, which introduced further challenges.

These findings don't show the complete experiences of participants and may not hold true for all ALTs in the JET Program due to the diversity of situations in which ALTs are placed. Common experiences among most, if not all participants provide insight into the complex experiences of ALTs. Results may be useful for individuals considering applying to the JET Program, as they can see stories of the JET Program from the perspectives of ALTs. This study may also be useful to participants by offering new perspectives and a chance to reflect on their experiences.

## 5.2 Limitations and Scope

Narrative inquiry does not rely on generalizability (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Therefore, as a narrative study, the results of this research are not generalizable. This research focused on participants who were ALTs in the JET Program, excluding the experiences of ALTs who came through private companies or who were hired directly by local entities. As such, it also only included ALTs at public schools, excluding ALTs teaching English at private and conversation schools. Furthermore, participation was limited to only ALTs who were native English speakers from the US and Great Britain, inner circle English countries, excluding ALTs from Canada, Australia, and outer circle English countries. It also did not consider ALTs who were brought to Japan by the JET Program to teach languages other than English. Finally, it looked specifically at the experiences of ALTs with the JET Program, excluding the experiences of CIRs and SEAs with the JET Program. In summary, the scope of this study is limited to exploring the stories of ALTs from the US and Great Britain who taught English at public schools through the JET Program.

The major limitation experienced during this study was time. Because narrative inquiry depends on deep understanding of participants' experiences, it was necessary to spend considerable time with each participant, 2-3 hours in this study. Five participants were living in Japan at the time of the study, so we had to navigate a fourteen-hour time difference when scheduling interviews. This severely limited the times interviews could take place. This challenge led to approximately a month to pass between first-round and second-round interviews, even though a shorter timeframe would have been ideal. Furthermore, scheduling challenges and the need for considerable time with each participant limited the number of participants that could be included in the study.

### 5.3 Further Research

#### 5.3.1 Researching other ALTs

This study focused exclusively on English speaking ALTs from inner circle English countries. This classification affected how they were viewed by coworkers, students, and communities and the expectations surrounding them. While participants didn't always perfectly fit the image of foreigners in Japan, they did have the advantage of speaking the language expected of foreigners and speaking common dialects of English. The JET Program does not only hire NESTs from inner circle English countries, however. Researching ALTs brought to teach English from outer circle English countries and even comparing ALTs from inner circle and outer circle countries could shed more light on the dynamic of world Englishes in Japanese English language education. It could also provide more information about images of foreigners in Japan and how those images affect perceptions of ALTs.

#### 5.3.2 The Intersectionality of Gender and Race

The intersectionality of gender and race and how it affects perceptions of ALTs and their identity negotiation was touched upon in this study. A deep analysis of this intersectionality is beyond the scope of this study, however. Further investigation into how the race and gender of ALTs interact to create certain assigned identities is needed. This research could examine how racial stereotypes and gender roles that are common in Japan shape the experiences of ALTs. Furthermore, it would be valuable to research if ALTs feel they are able to challenge these stereotypes and roles through their presence in Japan or if they find such ideas are persistent throughout their time on the JET Program.

#### 5.3.3 ALTs with Japanese Heritage

When considering diversity in the JET Program an interesting group that needs to be researched is ALTs with Japanese heritage. Unfortunately, none of the participants of this study are members of this demographic, but several participants mentioned that expectations and experiences for ALTs with Japanese heritage are often unique because they are seen as being both insiders and outsiders. Japanese heritage, and particularly Japanese names, may lead to expectations of linguistic and cultural knowledge. These expectations and status as both an insider and outsider add unique dimensions to these ALTs' experiences and identity negotiation.

#### 5.3.4 A Longitudinal Study

This study consisted of participants reflected on their experiences primarily through memory. Because identity negotiation is an ongoing process, conducting a longitudinal study following ALTs through their time on the JET Program could provide more detail into how their identity changed over time. Having ALTs share stories of their experiences negotiating identity in real time would also better capture their feelings throughout the process because they would

be fresh. It is generally more challenging to remember feelings in comparison to events, particularly when changes in feeling may be subtle.

### 5.3.5 Support for JET Program Alumni

After hearing about the challenges two participants faced returning to the US after completing the JET Program, it would be beneficial to research this phenomenon further. Conducting a study including multiple alumni of the JET Program would both provide more detail on the specific struggles that make returning to their home country the most challenging aspect of the JET Program for ALTs and may lead to a greater understanding of how to help alumni grapple with these challenges.

### 5.4 Conclusion

Interview data showed that ALTs face various challenges throughout their time on the JET Program. Inconsistent expectations from school to school and even class to class can make it difficult for ALTs to understand their roles and assist in classes to their full potential. The diversity of assigned identities ALTs encounter in the classroom may be caused by a variety of factors ranging from grade level to JTE teaching styles. While it is impossible to harmonize all factors that lead to the inconsistency of ALTs' roles, there are actions the JET Program could take to mitigate some. Firstly, the JET Program could create more specific guidelines explaining ALTs' roles in schools. Having a clear explanation of both what are and are not the duties of ALTs could more consistent utilization of ALTs across schools. If national guidelines are not seen as appropriate, as they would not be individualized to the needs and desires of each CO, it would also be possible for each CO to create their own guidelines in accordance with their goals. While this would not lead to consistency throughout the JET Program, it would at least increase consistency on an individual level for ALTs.



Recalling Jacob's comment that one of his JTEs uses him more effectively than his other JTEs due to her experience working with ALTs, (Jacob, first interview, January 27, 2018), consistency may be improved by training JTEs in team-teaching methods. By providing training in team-teaching, the JET Program could improve the how effectively JTEs utilize ALTs in the classroom. Moreover, such training would encourage increased consistency by ensuring that JTEs are all aware of the same team-teaching methods. It could also be used to further reinforce the duties officially assigned to ALTs by the JET Program or their COs by including methods that fall in line with these duties. Providing these guidelines and training to increase consistency throughout the individual experiences of ALTs could expedite ALTs stepping into their roles by giving them a better understanding of what their roles entail.

Every situation being different was not the only inconsistency in the lives of ALTs that appeared in the interviews. Participants also mentioned how the official purpose of the JET Program did not always match the actual or lived purpose of the JET Program in their eyes. There are two possibilities when it comes to the root of this discrepancy. First, MEXT recognized their need to understand the reality of ALTs lives on the JET Program (MEXT, 2011). Hence, it is possible that this discrepancy exists because the JET Program truly believes ALTs are primarily fulfilling the official purpose of the JET Program and lack understanding concerning how this is played out in reality. If this is the case, the JET Program administration needs to recognize this discrepancy and adjust its training and structure to encourage its official purpose. Conversely, it is possible that the JET Program administration is aware of this discrepancy, but hasn't sought to rectify it because they see the lived purpose of the JET Program as acceptable. If this is the case, altering the official purpose of the JET Program to

match its reality would better prepare new ALTs for their roles by giving them an accurate picture of their purpose from the time they begin researching the JET Program.

One particular goal of the JET Program some participants struggled in accomplishing was community involvement. While participants generally wanted to participate in the community, some found it challenging to identify opportunities for involvement. Conversely, participants found it easy to engage with the community at structured events. In order to support ALTs' involvement in their communities beyond these structured events, the JET Program could assist in connecting ALTs with community organizations. This support could be as simple as providing new ALTs with a list of some organizations in their city, their contact information, and a script they could use to express their desire to participate. By doing so, the JET Program could lower the barriers to community involvement and increase meaningful interactions between ALTs and community members.

Finally, the interviews showed that participants had to negotiate their identities both during their time on the JET Program and upon their return home after the JET Program. This negotiation proved particularly challenging for alumni participants. While the JET Program currently provides support for alumni through the JET Alumni Association (JETAA), there are additional ways they could be offering assistance. Specifically, when discussing teacher identity development and negotiation, Feryok (2012) mentioned the importance of recognizing learning beyond traditional professional development, specifically recognizing social forces and teacher socialization. What makes reverse culture shock so difficult is that it is unexpected. Providing ALTs with training concerning identity negotiation would both better help them understand their experiences during the JET Program and how their identities have changed in ways that may conflict with the identities they had before they left home. This would make the transition back

home easier by preparing ALTs for identity conflict and reassuring them that it is a natural process when changing social, political, and cultural contexts.

While there are many actions the JET Program administration could take to reduce challenges faced by ALTs, there are also ways future ALTs can prepare themselves for these challenges. The most important is to become familiar with the diverse experiences of ALTs. While reading about the experiences of other ALTs may not provide future ALTs with a clear picture of what their experience will be like because every situation is different, it will provide an idea of the range of ALT experiences and the range of roles ALTs can play. Thankfully, many online resources that provide information about the JET Program experience. AJET compiled a list of blogs and YouTube channels run by JETs that focus on their experiences in Japan that can be found at <https://ajet.net/community/jet-blogs/>. Popular Japanese culture and language blog Tofugu also has a 25 article series centering on the JET Program experience from application to life after the program that can be found at <https://www.tofugu.com/series/jet-program/>. In addition to online resources, I encourage future ALTs to connect with current or past JET Program ALTs and ask them about their experiences in Japan, both inside and outside of the classroom.

The JET Program offers a valuable opportunity for ALTs to participate in linguistic and cultural exchange. At the same time, it is a program composed of unique individual experiences that make it difficult to fully understand. This study seeks to present the experiences of seven ALTs through their stories. While their stories are their own, they can inform others of the variety of experiences to be found within the JET Program and provide examples of ALTs' realities.

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## Appendix A: Recruitment Letter for Personal and Professional Connections

Hello \_\_\_\_\_,

I hope you're doing well. I am currently pursuing an MA in TESOL at the University of Kansas in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching, and for my MA thesis, I am researching how Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) in the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET Program) negotiate their identities both inside and outside of the classroom. I am currently looking for participants willing to take part in my research study and was wondering if you would be interested in participating or would know anyone who would potentially be interested in participating.

**Purpose of the study:** This study aims to explore how ALTs navigate the identities as participants in the JET Program.

**Procedure of the study:** The study will consist of 2-3 interviews lasting approximately one hour each. Interviews may be conducted either in person or via a video messaging application such as Skype, etc., depending on what is most convenient for participants. Participants will also be provided with my ongoing analysis of their interviews to confirm that they feel my analysis is true to their experiences.

**Eligibility requirements:** Participants must be current ALTs or recent ALT alumni (having taught as an ALT in the last three years) of the JET Program.

**Benefits:** No compensation will be provided for participation in this study, but the study will provide insight into identity negotiation of ALTs both inside and outside of the classroom during exchange teaching programs and the challenges they face related to identity.

**Risks:** This study presents only minimal risks, and participants should not experience discomfort beyond that which they feel on a day to day basis. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions.

**Contact:** Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have concerning the study or to express interest in participating.

If instead of participating personally or in addition to participating personally, you know of anyone who you feel might be interested in my study, please let me know, so I can send you a letter with the details of the study and my contact information that you can pass on to them.

Thank you very much for considering my study, and I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

Annette Jardon

## Appendix B: Recruitment Letter for Snowball Sampling

Hello,

My name is Annette Jardon, and I am a graduate student pursuing an MA in TESOL at the University of Kansas in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching. For my MA thesis, I am researching how Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) in the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET Program) negotiate their identities both inside and outside of the classroom. As such, I am currently looking for participants willing to take part in my research study.

**Purpose of the study:** This study aims to explore how ALTs navigate the identities as participants in the JET Program.

**Procedure of the study:** The study will consist of 2-3 interviews lasting approximately one hour each. Interviews may be conducted either in person or via a video messaging application such as Skype, etc., depending on what is most convenient for participants. Participants will also be provided with my ongoing analysis of their interviews to confirm that they feel my analysis is true to their experiences.

**Eligibility requirements:** Participants must be current ALTs or recent ALT alumni (having taught as an ALT in the last three years) of the JET Program.

**Benefits:** No compensation will be provided for participation in this study, but the study will provide insight into identity negotiation of ALTs both inside and outside of the classroom during exchange teaching programs and the challenges they face related to identity.

**Risks:** This study presents only minimal risks, and participants should not experience discomfort beyond that which they feel on a day to day basis. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions.

**Contact:** Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have concerning the study or to express interest in participating.

Thank you very much for considering my study.

Sincerely,

Annette Jardon

## Appendix C: Oral Consent Script

As an MA student in the University of Kansas's Department of Curriculum and Teaching, I am conducting a research project about how ALTs negotiate their identities during their time participating in the JET Program. I would like to interview you to obtain insight into your experiences. Your participation is expected to consist of two to three one-hour interviews. You have no obligation to participate, and you may discontinue your involvement at any time.

Your participation should cause no more discomfort than you would experience in your everyday life. Although participation may not benefit you directly, the information obtained from the study will help us gain a better understanding into how ALTs negotiate their identities and the challenges teachers face related to their identities while participating in exchange teaching programs. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless (a) it is required by law or university policy, or (b) you give written permission. It is possible, however, with internet communications, that through intent or accident someone other than the intended recipient may hear your response.

This interview will be audio recorded. Recording is not required to participate. You may request that I stop taping at any time. The recordings will be transcribed by me. Only I and/or my faculty supervisor will have access to recordings which will be stored on an audio recording device that is not accessible by the internet, and recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Participation in the interview indicates your willingness to take part in this study and that you are at least 18 years old. Should you have any questions about this project or your participation in it you may ask me or my faculty supervisor, Hyesun Cho at the Department of Curriculum and Teaching. You may contact me by email at XXXXX or by phone at XXXXX. You may contact my faculty supervisor by email at XXXXX or by phone at XXXXX. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Human Research Protection Program at XXXXX or email XXXXX.

If you consent to participate in this research please say your name and, "I consent." If not, please say, "I do not consent." Please remember that participation is completely voluntary.

## Appendix D: First Interview Questions

Please tell me a little bit about yourself.

Tell me about your experience as an ALT for the JET Program.

What is/was your teaching situation like? (Number of schools, location, grade level, etc.)

What is/was your average day like?

What first interested you in the JET Program?

What kind of teaching experiences did you have before the JET Program?

What challenges do/did you face as an ALT?

How are/were you viewed by their students, co-teachers, etc.?

What are/were others' expectations for you?

What do you feel your role is/was in Japan?

What memories stick out to you from your time as an ALT?

(For current ALTs) What are your plans for after the JET Program?

(For JET Program alumni) What have you been doing since you completed the JET Program?

## Appendix E: Second Interview Questions

What were your goals when you entered the JET Program?

How did you prepare for the JET Program?

What has surprised you about your experience so far?

If you studied abroad/had been to Japan before, how were your previous experiences in Japan different from this time around?

What do you think is the purpose of the JET Program?

What do you specifically contribute to the classroom/community?

Do you feel you're being used effectively?

Has your level of responsibility been fairly constant?

In what ways are you treated like other teachers at your school and in what ways are you treated differently?

Have you considered pursuing more formal educational training?

Tell me about some cross-cultural experiences you've had.

What has been your greatest culture shock?

If you could change anything about your experience with the JET Program, what would it be?